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JULY 24, 2000

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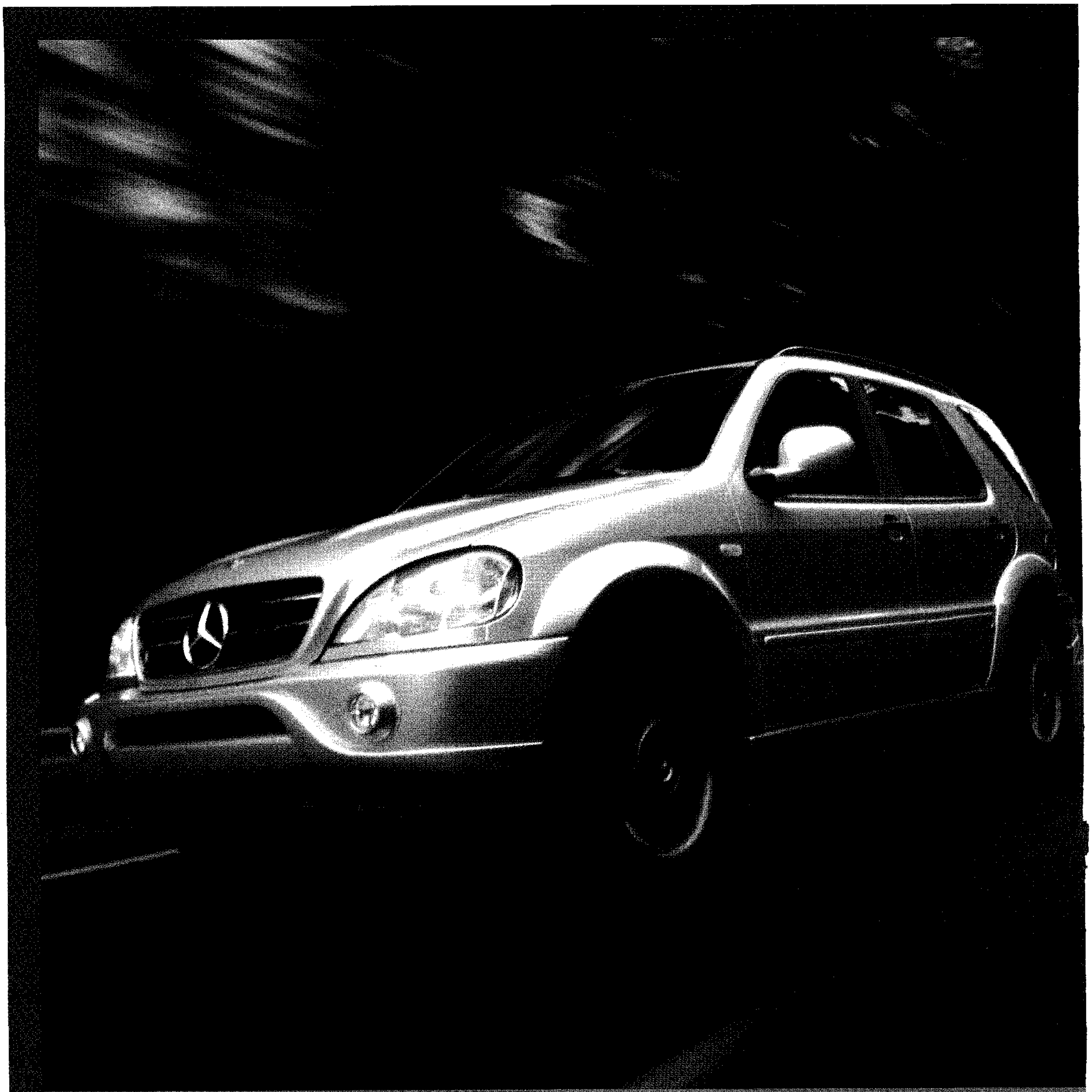

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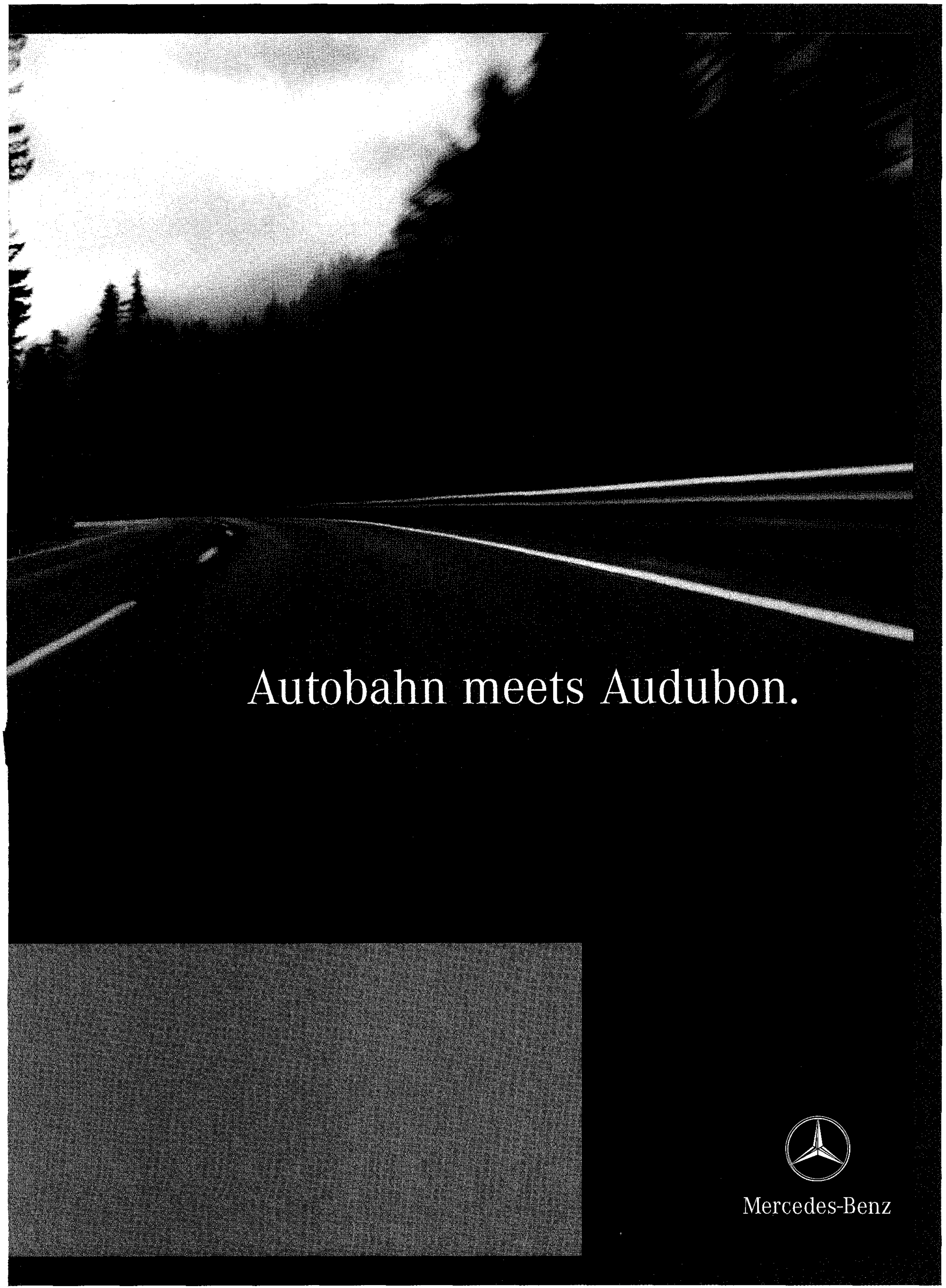
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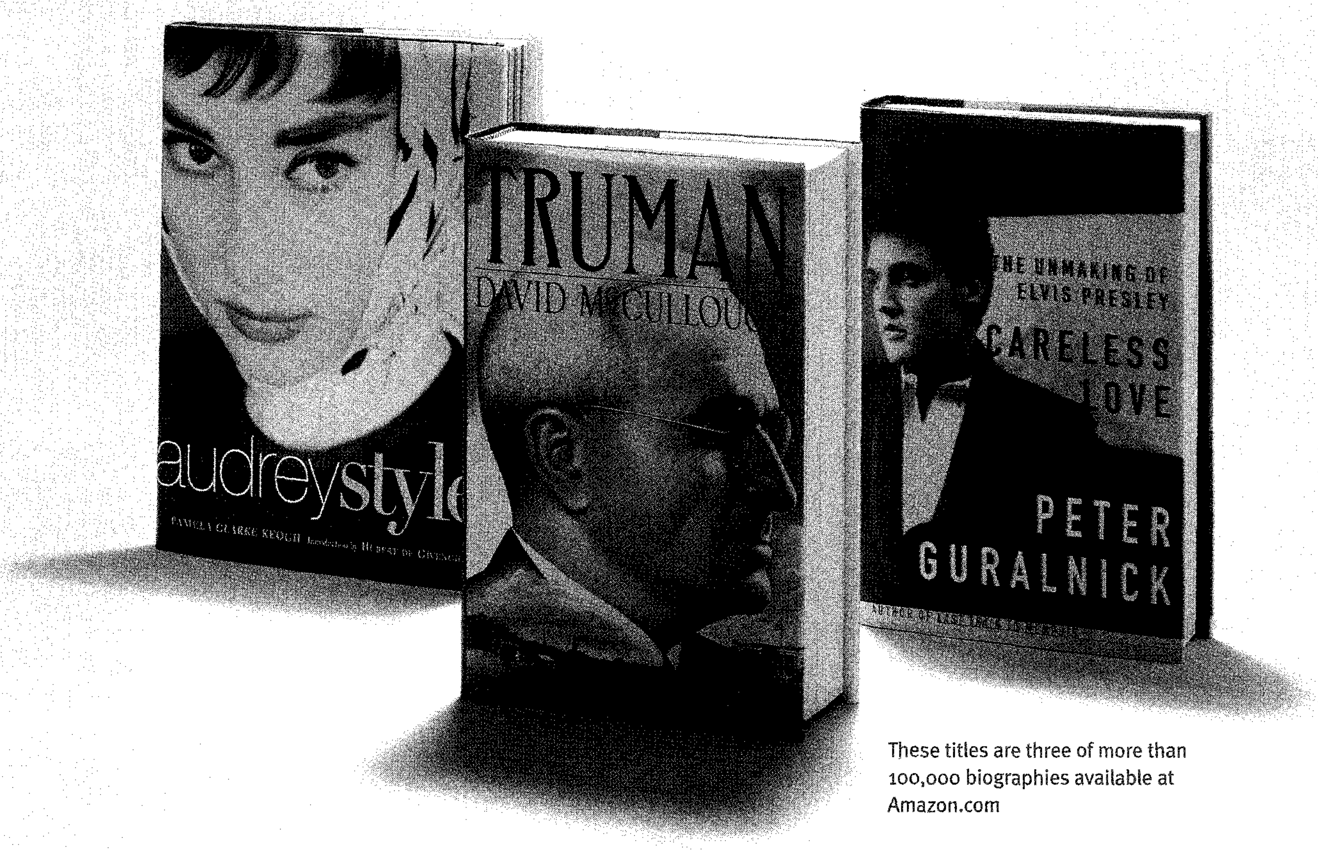
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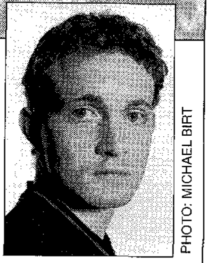

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"[A] meticulous, judicious, and surprisingly lively biography...Murray's Bosie is more complex and, ultimately, sympathetic than the one you thought you knew." —*NEW YORK MAGAZINE*

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CONTRIBUTORS

Nicholson Baker ("Deadline," p. 42) is the author of five novels, including, most recently, "The Everlasting Story of Nory." He has also published two works of nonfiction, "U and I" and "The Size of Thoughts."

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Brigitte Lacombe (Photograph, p. 56) has compiled a retrospective of her work entitled "Lacombe: Cinema/Theatre/Book One," which will be published in the fall.

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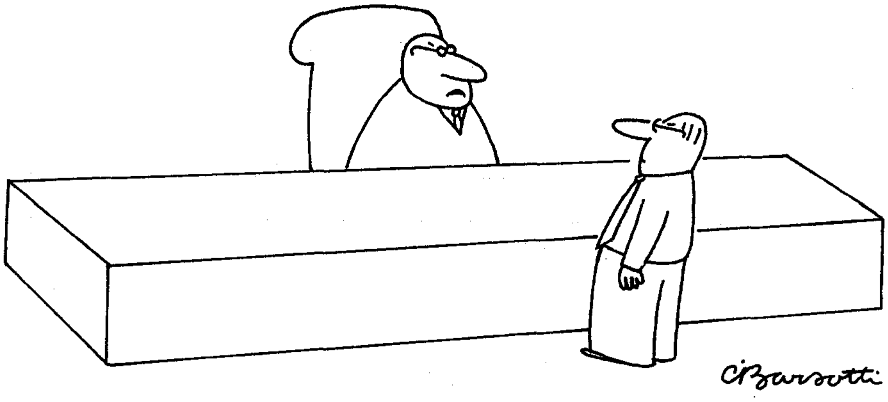
Andy Borowitz (Shouts & Murmurs, p. 37) is the author of "The Trillionaire Next Door," which appeared this month.

William Hamilton (The Back Page, p. 88), a regular contributor since 1965, has published several collections of cartoons and three novels. ♦



"Life isn't fair, Cosgrove. Now bring me your wife."

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THE MAIL

FALSE MEMORIES

In The Talk of the Town (June 19th & 26th), Mark Singer reports that Mark Helfrich misled the female models who posed nude for his book "Naked Pictures of My Ex-Girlfriends" about how he intended to use the pictures, and then lied to the public about the circumstances in which the photographs were taken. Not only did Helfrich pretend to have had sex with his subjects but he also invented details about their personal lives which he published as fact. Ironically, his photographic "memoir" might have been more interesting if he'd openly acknowledged the make-believe. Cindy Sherman has built a brilliant career out of making photographs that play on her personal, and our cultural, fantasy life. Helfrich could have contributed a fresh gloss to that genre. But he settled for being a creep.
Elizabeth Gand
Piedmont, Calif.

BOOKS FOR BOYS

In "The Battle Over Boys" (Books, July 10th), Nicholas Lemann notes that the boys whose testimony makes up most of William S. Pollack's book do not share Huck Finn's dread of being "sivilized." That dread is the whole point of Huck as a character. He can't be civilized, no matter what your theory of boys is. Tom can. (Tom, in fact, is overcivilized.) But Mark Twain is not about to leave his readers confused and tormented (as the writers Lemann discusses do). He tells us straight out to put books aside and let boys be boys. And, like any wise man, he removes any fears we might have about what happens to boys. Twain lets us know in his conclusion to "Tom Sawyer" that "most of the characters that perform in this book still live, and are prosperous and happy."
Charles M. Luther
Katy, Tex.

Both books reviewed by Mr. Lemann—William S. Pollack's and Christina Hoff Sommers's—fervently promote views of how our society is harming boys. I'd like to believe that the writers are sincere, but when they present only evidence that affirms their arguments, and fail to acknowledge any exceptions to their "rules," they seem to be trying too hard. If reality were as alarming as they present it, would we need to be notified?
Jean Denious
Tempe, Ariz.

What a hoot that Christina Hoff Sommers approves of teaching "Silas Marner" rather than "Jane Eyre" to boys in order to bolster their sense of manliness. After all, "Silas Marner" is a book about a man who discovers his humanity through a nurturing relationship with a child. It might be the original role-reversal story.
Katherine Karlin
Pittsburgh, Pa.

IN DEFENSE OF ZELDA

Claudia Roth Pierpont's "For Love and Money" (July 3rd) seems to reflect Hemingway's malicious "Zelda ruined Scott" line. But F. Scott Fitzgerald's impact on Zelda's life was at least as disastrous as hers on his. "Plagiarism begins at home," she complained in a review of "The Beautiful and Damned" about passages similar to what she'd written in a diary that had disappeared shortly after their marriage. And, later, Scott became so controlling that he would not even allow Zelda to leave a sanitorium to return to her mother's home. Zelda was misunderstood and misdiagnosed and underrated even by her biographer; perpetuating such distortions keeps alive the same sexist traditions that were a part of making her life a hell.
David Ray
Tucson, Ariz.

•

Letters should be sent with the writer's name, address, and daytime phone number to "The Mail," The New Yorker, 4 Times Square, New York, N.Y. 10036. They can also be faxed to 212-286-5047 or sent via E-mail to themail@newyorker.com. Letters may be edited for length and clarity, and may be published in any medium; we regret that owing to the volume of correspondence we cannot reply to every letter.

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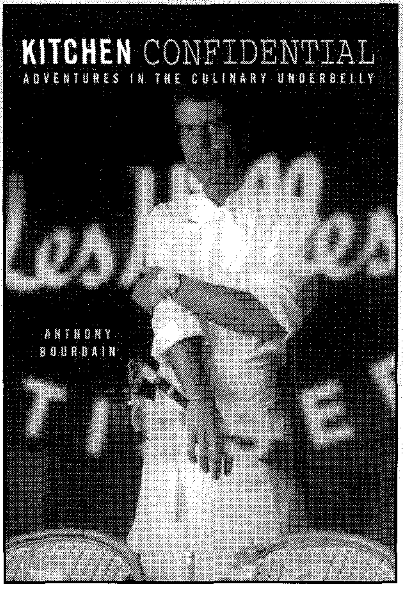

"Utterly riveting, swaggering with stylish machismo and a precise ear for kitchen patois."
—New York Magazine

"[A] literary chef, as appreciated for quips as for steak frites."—The New York Times

"Unique . . . mesmerizing."—Newsweek

"Funny, irreverent, scandalous."—Daily News

"You'll laugh, you'll cry. . . you're gonna love it."
—The Denver Post

"Bourdain clearly operates with all six burners on scorch, and the result keeps the reader excited."—USA Today*

"The guy is hysterical . . . in a style partaking of Hunter S. Thompson, Iggy Pop and a little Jonathan Swift, Bourdain gleefully rips through the scenery to reveal private backstage horrors."
—The New York Times Book Review

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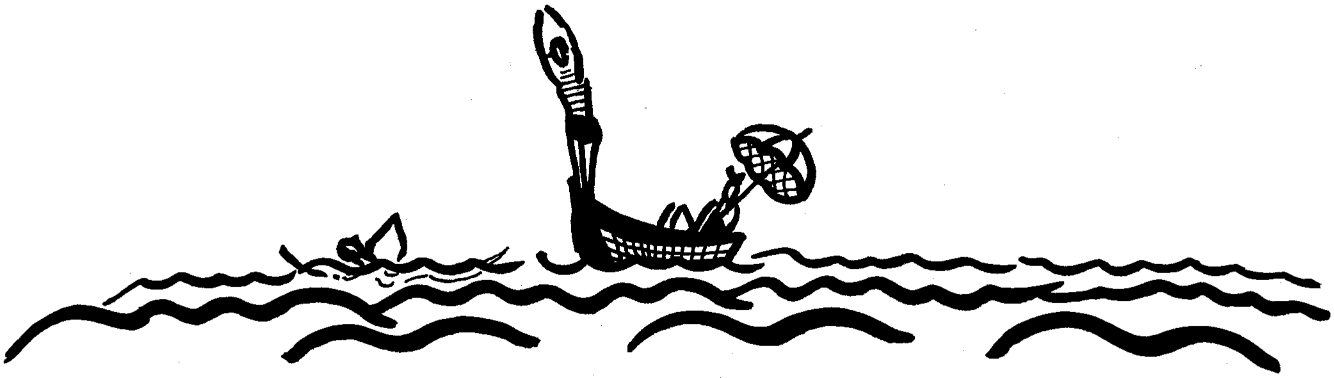

THE THEATRE
OPENINGS & PREVIEWS

Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.

AVOW
A progressive priest refuses to marry two gay men, in a new drama by Bill C. Davis ("Mass Appeal"). In previews. (Century Center, 111 E. 15th St. 239-6200.)

GODSPELL
An updated version of the 1971 rock musical, with music and new lyrics by Stephen Schwartz. In previews. (Theatre at St. Peter's Church, Lexington Ave. at 54th St. 239-6200.)

HIGH INFIDELITY
In John Dooley's comedy, John Davidson and Morgan Fairchild star as a Presidential candidate and his wife, who are forced to participate in marriage counselling by their political party. In previews. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

THE MAN WHO CAME TO DINNER
Nathan Lane and Jean Smart lead the cast in a Roundabout revival of Kaufman and Hart's 1939 comedy. Jerry Zaks is the director. In previews. (American Airlines Theatre, 227 W. 42nd St. 719-1300.)

SHAKESPEARE IN THE PARK(ING LOT)
Expanded Arts' sixth season of free outdoor Shakespeare continues with "A Midsummer Night's Dream." Preview on July 19. Opens July 20 at 8 and runs through Aug. 5. (Municipal Parking Lot at Broome and Ludlow Sts. For information about reservations, which are required, call 358-5096.)

SPINNING INTO BUTTER
Rebecca Gilman's drama about the aftermath of a racist incident at a politically correct Vermont college. Daniel Sullivan is the director. In previews. (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

OPENED RECENTLY

AIDA
Disney's new musical—five years in the making and a product of Pharaonic expense—is, if not perfect, a lively, polished entertainment with bursts of joyful flamboyance worthy of its composer, Elton John. The two female leads—Heather Headley, as Aida, and Sherie René Scott, as Amneris—shine in their different ways, and Bob Crowley's brilliant sets give the show both visual dazzle and emotional resonance. Directed by Robert Falls. (Reviewed in our issue of 4/10/00.) (Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4747.)

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			19	20	21	22
23	24	25				

THE AMERICAN LIVING ROOM
The performance space HERE's summer festival, highlighting the work of thirty-nine emerging directors. (145 Sixth Ave., near Spring St. For tickets and information, call 647-0202.)

AQUILA THEATRE COMPANY
The British-American touring troupe is in town for the summer, presenting repertory performances of "The Iliad" and "The Comedy of Errors" through Aug. 6. The residency continues through Sept. 17. (Hemmerdinger Hall, 100 Washington Sq. E. 307-4100.)

CONTACT
The director and choreographer Susan Stroman's dance play, a triptych of simple stories about the various forms of human connection and the atmosphere of longing, is a big-hearted, witty crowd-pleaser. (10/18 & 10/25/99) (Vivian Beaumont, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

COPENHAGEN
Michael Frayn's play speculates on the controversial 1941 reunion of the two giants of quantum mechanics—the physicists Niels Bohr (Philip Bosco) and Werner Heisenberg (Michael Cumpsty). It is so meticulous, so admirable, and so grave that you want to tousle its well-kempt appearance and tell it to lighten up. Nevertheless, the director, Michael Blakemore, manages to make dynamic and suggestive an evening that consists of three actors (Blair Brown plays Margrethe Bohr) and three chairs. (4/24 & 5/1/00) (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE DANCE ON WIDOWS' ROW
Four rich widows throw a party for the town widowers, in a comedy by Samm-Art Williams. (Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 353-1176. Closes July 30.)

DIRTY BLONDE
Mae West's flirty and dirty persona is the subject of a cunningly written, raffish evening conceived by the writer-actress Claudia Shear and the director James Lapine. Mae's story is recounted with brio by two fans—Jo (Shear, who doubles winningly as Mae) and Charlie (Tom Riis Farrell). The success of the play rests not on the louche facts of West's life but on the intersection of her story with the sweetness of the evolving relationship between the two lost souls who narrate it. (2/7/00) (Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

EMERGING ARTISTS
The second installation in the Performing Garage's summer festival is a work in progress by the dancer Bill Shannon, who performs on crutches. July 20-23 at 8. The series continues through July 30. (33 Wooster St. 966-3651.)

FESTIVAL OF INDIAN THEATRE
A series of works by contemporary Indian playwrights, performed in English by the original Indian casts. Mahesh Dattani's "Dance Like a Man" runs through July 26. The festival continues through Aug. 2. (Tribeca Performing Arts Center, 199 Chambers St. 346-8510.)

FOR COLORED GIRLS WHO HAVE CONSIDERED SUICIDE WHEN THE RAINBOW IS ENUF
Ntozake Shange's 1974 choreopoem, directed by George Faison. (American Place, 111 W. 46th St. 239-6200.)

GREAT BLACK ONE-ACTS
A festival of plays by black writers, staged by Woodie King, Jr.,'s National Black Touring Circuit. (Henry Street Settlement, 466 Grand St. 353-1176. Closes Aug. 6.)

HIP-HOP THEATRE FESTIVAL
Two one-woman shows: "Surface Transit," by Sarah Jones, who portrays eight urban characters, and "Sistah Supreme," an autobiographical piece by Liza Colón-Zayas. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288.)

ICE FACTORY FESTIVAL 2000
Soho Think Tank's summer shindig highlighting new works continues with "What's the Matter," a dance-theatre piece that investigates a death. July 19-22 at 7. The festival continues through Aug. 12. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 966-4844.)

JESUS CHRIST SUPERSTAR
This misguided Broadway revival of Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber's 1971 musical version of the Saviour's last days on earth starts out by asking the tantalizing question "What's the buzz?" but never delivers a theatrically satisfying answer. Still, with its archaic whiff of right-wing outrage and its singable seventies-rock score, it's fun for nostalgia's sake. (Ford Center for the Performing Arts, 213 W. 43rd St. 307-4100.)

JESUS HOPPED THE A TRAIN
A man is imprisoned for murdering a cult leader, in a comedy-drama by Stephen Adly Guirgis. Philip Seymour Hoffman, recently seen in "True West," is the director. (Center Stage, 48 W. 21st St. 929-2228.)

JITNEY
August Wilson's play is set in a car-service station in 1977, in a part of Pittsburgh which is being demolished faster than it's being renovated. In this atmosphere of decay, Wilson's characters struggle with themselves and with each other to find some hope, and some peace, amidst the rubble. The cast of nine wonderful actors hit perfect notes of collision and cohesion, and turn what might otherwise

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be a draggy experience (the play runs to nearly three hours) into a riveting and moving one. (Second Stage, 307 W. 43rd St. 246-4422.)

JOE FEARLESS (A FAN DANCE)
A great and irresistible idea—above-the-rim basketball choreographed for the stage—attached to a goofy melodrama, in which the title character loses his job, wife, kids, and even his TV as a result of his fanatical devotion to his team. The basketball (highlights from a fictional seven-game N.B.A. finals) overshadows the drama, which takes place smack in the middle of the games (literally: the alley-oop passes sail right over the TV-room couch). But the athlete-actors pull off Globetrotter high jinks right on cue, the cheerleaders dance with exaggerated licentiousness, and the accompanying jock interviews and talk-radio postmortems are both on target and hilariously over the top. In an especially appropriate touch, the play has two endings, depending on whether or not the final shot goes in. (Atlantic, 336 W. 20th St. 239-6200.)

JUDITH SHAKESPEARE COMPANY
A gender-reversed staging of "Julius Caesar" in repertory with a Prohibition-era version of "The Comedy of Errors." (Mint, 311 W. 43rd St. 532-8887. Closes July 22.)

KISS ME, KATE
With all its admirable expertise and its various delights, this production of the Cole Porter musical is oddly earthbound: it comes down to the vexing issue of chemistry. The leads, Marin Mazzie and Brian Stokes Mitchell, are expert players, but they are not—in the true meaning of the words—star performers. (11/29/99) (Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

THE LARAMIE PROJECT
A drama about the murder of gay-hate victim Matthew Shepard, written and directed by Moisés Kaufman. (Union Square Theatre, 100 E. 17th St. 307-4100.)

MEASURE FOR MEASURE
The Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival begins its summer season. (Boscobel Restoration, Garrison, N.Y. For ticket information and directions, call 914-265-9575. Closes July 30.)

THE MUSIC MAN
A delightful revival of Meredith Willson's 1957 musical, directed by Susan Stroman and starring Craig Bierko, who is making his Broadway début in the role of Professor Harold Hill. The show hits us with the simplicity and seamlessness of a perfect fairy tale, and it puts music in its proper place—right up there with all the other miracles of life. (5/22/00) (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

NEIL SIMON'S HOTEL SUITE
A bride locks herself in the bathroom on her wedding day. A man wakes up in a hotel room with a strange woman passed out in his bed and his wife en route. An aging actress adores her bisexual antique-dealer husband but worries that his interest in men will prevail. The setups for these reheated fragments from Simon's "Suite" plays have the feel of stale seventies sitcoms, but they rate high on the middle-aged crowd's Laff-O-Meter and capture, however unwittingly, the innocence and humor of decades past. The cast (Helen Carey, Randy Graff, Leigh Lawson, Ron Orbach, Charlie McWade, and Amanda Serkasevich) all shine in their own ways. (Gramercy Theatre, 127 E. 23rd St. 307-4100.)

NEVER SWIM ALONE
The Canadian playwright Daniel MacIvor's latest dark comedy—thirteen scenes concerned with the lifelong friendship of two men. (Soho Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 239-6200.)

THE PICTURE
This new translation, by Abigail Sanders, of Eugène Ionesco's 1963 inquiry into the transformative power of art (and the limits of that power) is both intellectually intriguing and very funny. The two lead performances, by Tony Torn, as a rich businessman, and Tom Pearl, as a painter, employ the bombastic and subtle styles of comic acting, respectively, and Ian Belton's direction is perfectly paced. (Cha, 135 W. 42nd St. 206-7188. Closes July 22.)

PROOF
The young playwright David Auburn's drama stars Mary-Louise Parker as the daughter of a brilliant University of Chicago mathematician, whose life and career began to disintegrate in his mid-twenties when he became mentally ill. Parker's character appears to have similar gifts and, possibly, similar troubles, and Parker skillfully delivers the smart and sullen, insolent and indolent goods. You wish the play were a little richer, a little less simply resolved, but its level of accomplishment and the realness of its characters show that Auburn has both depth and a voice. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes July 30.)

THE REAL THING
Revived here with an excellent cast (especially Stephen Dillane) and subtle direction by David Leveaux, Tom Stoppard's 1984 drama remains the wittiest, sharpest look at that twisted thing called love to come around in decades. (Ethel Barrymore, 243 W. 47th St. 239-6200.)

THE RIDE DOWN MT. MORGAN
"Why have I been condemned?" the aptly named bigamist Lyman Felt (Patrick Stewart) asks, rather whinily, toward the end of Arthur Miller's latest play, an examination of the seeming impossibility of fidelity, or, at least, lifelong marriage. And you trust that Lyman is truly in the dark about how he could be convicted of having love for two women. The problem with Miller's project is that his lying Lyman is no longer in love with his first wife at all, and he seems to have only lust for the second. (Ambassador, 219 W. 49th St. 239-6200. Closes July 23.)

THE RIDICU-FEST
A festival of camp comedies by playwrights both familiar (Charles Busch, Charles Ludlam, Ethyl Eichelberger) and little known (John Issendorf, Todd Miller). (For schedule and location information, call 420-1466. Closes July 23.)

RIVERDANCE
The Irish troupe of dancers, singers, and musicians. (Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER
John Travolta is not easy to replace, nor are the ashes of disco fever likely to reignite, as this show, based on the 1977 movie, demonstrates. (Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4100.)

SWING!
No plot, just a hot band, Olympic-class dancers, and major panties—this show, a tribute to swing and its dance counterpart, the Lindy (mother of the jitterbug), lives up to its name. Directed and choreographed by Lynne Taylor-Corbett. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

TRUE WEST
A sensational revival of Sam Shepard's 1980 play, directed by Matthew Warchus and starring Josh Brolin and Elias Koteas. It's a droll tall tale of sibling rivalry, in which an intrusive, beer-swilling outlaw named Lee and his brother, Austin, a put-upon Ivy League screenwriter, face off in their vacationing mother's tidy modern kitchen. (3/27/00) (Circle in the Square, 50th St. west of Broadway. 239-6200.)

UBU IS KING!
Free outdoor theatre from the Gorilla Rep—an adaptation of Alfred Jarry's "Ubu Roi." Fridays at 8, Saturdays at 8 and 10, and Sundays at 6 and 8. (Washington Square Park. For more information, call 330-8086.)

WHEN THEY SPEAK OF RITA
Daisy B. Foote's drama, about a discontented housewife in rural New Hampshire. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-3052.)

LONG RUNS

ANNIE GET YOUR GUN
Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.

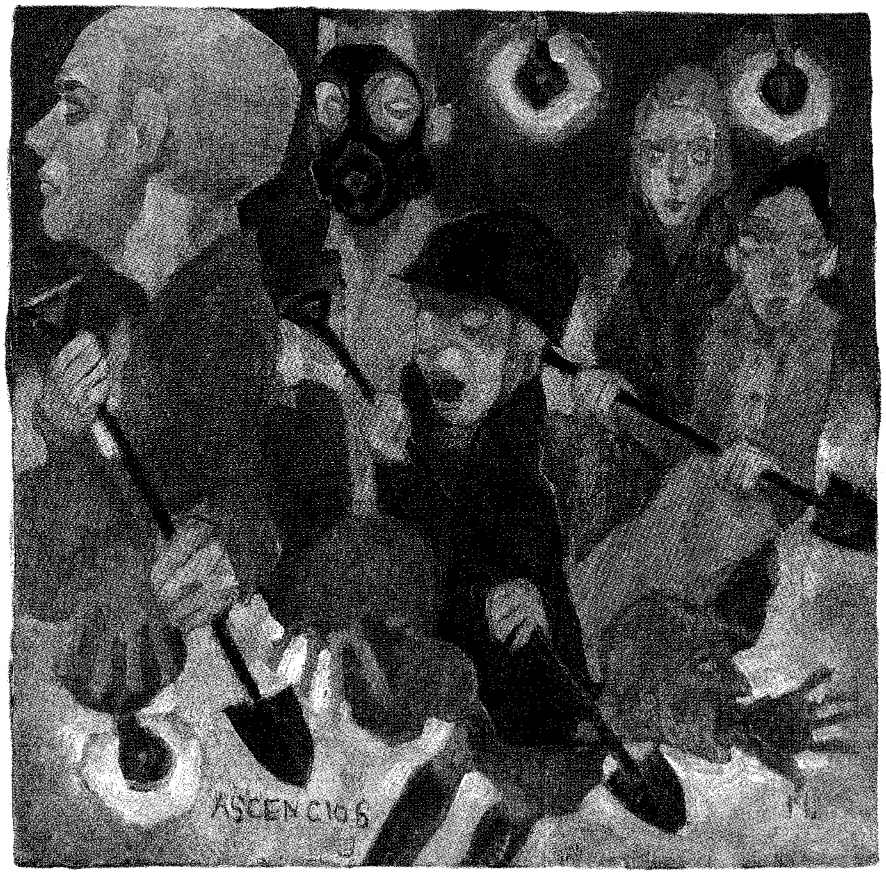
CABARET
Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 239-6200.

CHICAGO
Shubert, 225 W. 44th St. 239-6200.

DINNER WITH FRIENDS
Variety Arts, 110 Third Ave.,
at 14th St. 239-6200.

FORBIDDEN BROADWAY
Stardust, Broadway at 51st St. 239-6200.

FOSSE
Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.



The Aquila Theatre Company, in "The Iliad (Book One)."

THE LION KING
New Amsterdam, 214 W. 42nd St. 307-4100.
RENT
Nederlander, 208 W. 41st St. 921-8000.
THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES
Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 239-6200.

DANCE

THE BOLSHOI BALLET
The two-hundred-and-twenty-five-year-old company appears with the New York City Opera Orchestra in two programs. July 18 at 8, July 22 at 2 and 8, and July 23 at 3: "Giselle." ♦ July 19-21 at 8: Selections from "Spartacus," "Don Quixote," "La Bayadère," and the complete "Symphony in C," choreographed by George Balanchine. (New York State Theatre. 721-6500.)

BILL T. JONES/ARNIE ZANE DANCE COMPANY
July 19 and July 21-22 at 8: The ten-member troupe performs "You Walk?," a nine-part work set to a variety of musical accompaniments (including blues, fado, Amazon Indian music, medieval Spanish dance tunes, and a contemporary Brazilian take on Gregorian chant). ♦ July 20 at 8: "The Breathing Show," a solo for Jones. (LaGuardia Concert Hall, Amsterdam Ave. at 65th St. 721-6500.)

PILOBOLUS DANCE THEATRE
For the final performances of its monthlong engagement, the six-member company presents two programs, each of which includes three repertory works and a première. (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800. July 17-21 at 8 and July 22 at 2 and 8.)

RONALD K. BROWN/EVIDENCE & PHILIP HAMILTON
The choreographer Ronald K. Brown and his company collaborate with vocalist Philip Hamilton on an untitled work that draws from ritual dances of Benin, Cuba, Brazil, and the Ivory Coast. Hamilton also performs selections from "Vocalscapes." (Central Park SummerStage, Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. July 21 at 8:30. *No tickets necessary.*)

DANCES FOR WAVE HILL
The annual outdoor series of site-specific works commissioned for the Bronx garden by Dancing in the Streets. July 19 at 6:30: "Double E," by Nai-Ni Chen Dance Company, "Descend/Ascend," a duet by Guta Hedewig, and an installation of old saws, clay pots, pipes, pans, and other percussion instruments, introduced by an inaugural piece composed and played by Terry Dame and the Junkyard Gamelan. ♦ July 23 at 5: Four choreographers from the Field, Aviva Geismar, Heather Harrington, Tiffany Mills, and Philippa Kaye, each present a work. (675 W. 252nd St., the Bronx. 718-549-3200.)

NOCHE FLAMENCA
The eleven-member company, under the direction of Martin Santangelo, offers new work ("La Plaza," in which competing flamenco stylists meet and trade steps at a marketplace) in addition to its satisfying repertory of traditional forms: *alegrías, farrucas,* and, best of all, the *soleá,* performed by Soledad Barrio, who can transform the most demanding passages of percussive footwork into reflective turns of great sadness and introspection. (Connelly Theatre, 220 E. 4th St. 279-4200. July 18-22 at 8 and July 23 at 5.)

HUDSON RIVER FESTIVAL
The free series in Battery Park City. July 25 at 7: Philadanco, the Philadelphia Dance Company. (Rockefeller Park.)

OUT OF TOWN

NATALIE ASCENCIOS

FIRE ISLAND DANCE FESTIVAL
The annual dance showcase in the Pines brings out an impressive list of companies and soloists (Jamie Bishton, Richard Move, Robert LaFosse, Doug Varone & Dancers, Cortez & Co.), who, as a rule, stay for the parties that surround, and sometimes

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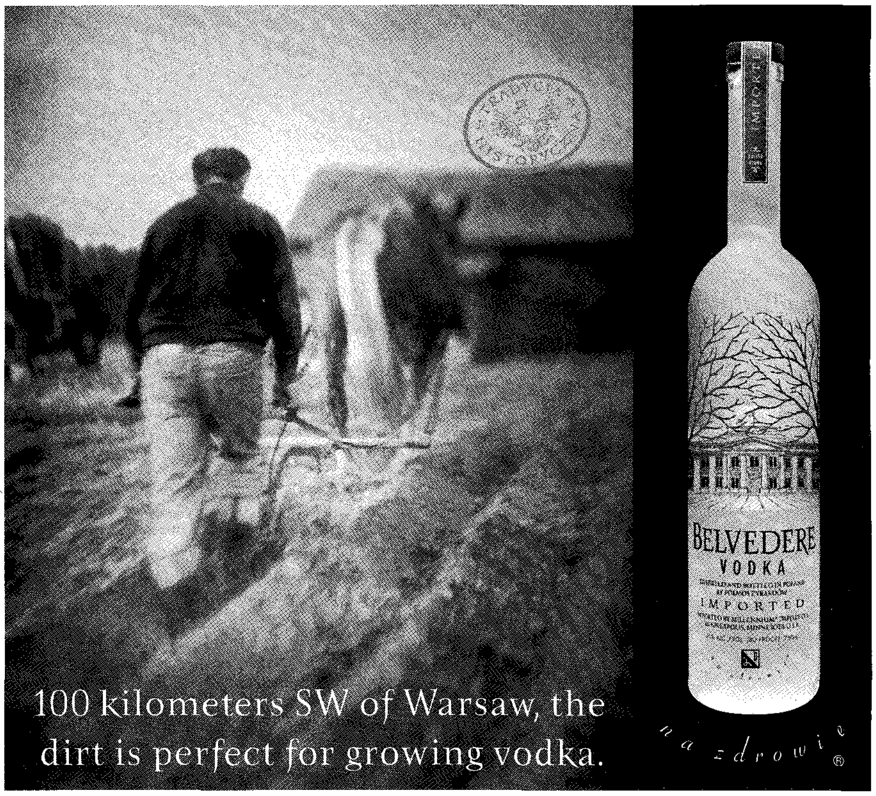
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amiably overwhelm, the performances. (262 Bay Walk East, the Pines, Fire Island. 212-840-0770. July 22 at 5:30 and 7:30 and July 23 at 4:30.)

JACOB'S PILLOW DANCE FESTIVAL
July 18-21 at 8, July 22 at 2 and 8, and July 23 at 2: Compagnie Maguy Marin, in "Waterzooi." ♦ July 20-21 at 8:15 and July 22-23 at 5: Beppie Blankert. (Becket, Mass. For information about tickets, call 413-243-0745.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

MIDSUMMER NIGHT SWING
Highlights from the alfresco dance festival. July 19: First-class jump blues, Western swing, and rockabilly with the Los Angeles sextet **Big Sandy and His Fly-Rite Boys.** July 22: **David Berger** and the **Sultans of Swing,** featuring vocalists **Aria Hendricks** and **Calloway Brooks.** (Fountain Plaza, Lincoln Center. For more information, call 875-5766. All shows at 8:15. Dance lessons are offered at 6:30.)

JETHRO TULL
Having overcome such pop-music indignities as baldness and a heavy-metal Grammy, Ian Anderson and company now look to the future: the band's latest record has a shiny new-media title, "J-Tull Dot Com." (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. July 19 at 8.)

JIMMIE DALE GILMORE
The Texas-bred troubadour was named after country legend Jimmie Rodgers, and his panoramic songs roll on like one of the Singing Brakeman's trains. That is, when he chooses to write them. His latest album, "One Endless Night," traffics mainly in covers, tackling the work of Butch Hancock, Townes Van Zandt, Robert Hunter, and others. On the final cut, Gilmore takes on the standard "Mack the Knife," and you have to wonder why. (Angel Orensanz Center, 172 Norfolk St. 307-7171. July 20 at 7:45.)

"JAZZ IN JULY"
July 19: Yes, Virginia, there was jazz piano before Herbie Hancock and McCoy Tyner, as **Dick Hyman** and **Derek Smith** seek to remind us each year at their mainstream piano party. This year's guests include **Dena DeRose, Jay Leonhardt, Jon Webber,** and **Ruth Laredo.** ♦ July 20: Ever since the bop era, the jazz trio has become synonymous with the intertwining sound of piano, bass, and drums. Yet the three-piece unit has a more varied history. Celebrating the influential piano-guitar-and-bass trios of Nat Cole are **Dick Hyman, Howard Alden,** and **Sean Smith; Bucky Pizzarelli, Jay Leonhardt,** and **Peter Appleyard** will evoke the trademark guitar-bass-and-vibraphone sound of Red Norvo's units; while **Kenny Davern, Derek Smith,** and **Tony DeNicola** tip their hats to Benny Goodman's popular clarinet-piano-and-drums trios. ♦ July 25: The delightful musical gumbo that is, was, and ever shall be New Orleans is here honored in all its life-affirming diversity, with **Ty Stephens, Carrie Smith, David Thomas Roberts, Vince Giordano,** and others. (92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100. All shows at 8.)

"UP IN SMOKE TOUR"
The lineup may sound like characters from a children's cartoon, but rappers **Dr. Dre, Snoop Dogg, Ice Cube,** and **Eminem** are anything but a joke. Reports from the road indicate that this show is full of professionalism, spectacle, and imagination, three words that are not often applied to hip-hop performances. (Nassau Coliseum. 212-307-7171. July 19 at 8.)

"MUSIC FROM THE ETHER"
A concert celebrating the otherworldly sounds of the theremin. A part of the Lincoln Center Festival. (New York Society for Ethical Culture, 2 W. 64th St. 721-6500. July 19 at 8.)

DIRTY DOZEN BRASS BAND
These Crescent City revisionists put the stomp in everything they play, from Jelly Roll Morton to Michael Jackson. James Brown notwithstanding, the band's top brass—trumpeters, saxophonists, sousaphonists, and a tuba player—may be the hardest-working men in show business. (Castle Clinton, Battery Park. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 835-2789. July 20 at 7.)

Blonde Redhead, at Bowery Ballroom.

MICHAEL KUPPERMAN

MEREDITH MONK
The final shows of a three-concert retrospective organized by the Lincoln Center Festival. The vocalist is backed by a chamber ensemble on July 21 at 8. (Carnegie Hall. For more information, call 875-5030.) ♦ She's joined by her vocal ensemble for a program that includes short films on July 23 at 8. (LaGuardia Concert Hall, Amsterdam Ave. at 65th St. For more information, call 875-5030.)

MOODY BLUES
Back in 1969, these first-generation progressive rockers put out an album called "To Our Children's Children's Children"; maybe some of them will be in the audience. (Jones Beach Theatre. 516-221-1000. July 22 at 8.)

BATTLE OF THE BRASS BANDS
Three days after the Dirty Dozen Brass Band plays in Battery Park, two other New Orleans brass bands slug it out on stage. One is the Re-Birth Brass Band; the other a band of youngsters led by Trombone Shorty, a thirteen-year old wunderkind. Expect a loud, sweaty, intergenerational party. (Central Park SummerStage, mid-Park at 72nd St. No tickets necessary. For more information, call 360-2777. July 23 at 3.)

BEACH BOYS / FOUR TOPS
Rock-and-roll nostalgia by the sea. Mike Love headlines, sans Brian Wilson, while the Four Tops offer a hit-filled catalogue that dates back to the days of "Baby, I Need Your Loving" and "Ask the Lonely." (Jones Beach Theatre. July 23 at 7:30.)

DEF LEPPARD
These blokes from working-class Sheffield first hit the jackpot seventeen years ago with "Pyromania," the definitive blend of big hair, tight britches, and chant-along choruses. The band kept its head high through a series of rock-and-roll tragedies—in particular, a New Year's Eve incident in which drummer Rick Allen lost an arm—which, naturally, assure them a place in the hard-rock pantheon (not to mention a superb "Behind the Music" special). The trousers may be larger in the waist and the hair somewhat smaller, but Allen is still the best one-armed drummer in the business. (Jones Beach Theatre. July 24 at 7:30.)

"NYABINGHI SPIRIT AND THE HEARTBEAT OF REGGAE"
The nyabinghi style of drumming—relentless pounding on three different-sized drums (a bass, a funde, and a repeater)—which is a feature of Rastafarian meetings called "grounations," is at the very heart of reggae music. The Mystic Revelation of Rastafari, led by master drummer Count Ossie, fused the nyabinghi sound with Rasta chants and impressive horns. Ossie has passed away, but the M.R.R. keeps drumming, and this summer's performance marks their first appearance here in twenty-five years. With the esteemed Jamaican dub poet Mutabaruka. A part of the Lincoln Center Festival. (New York Society for Ethical Culture. July 24 at 9.)

CLUBS

Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it's advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.

ARLENE GROCERY
95 Stanton St., between Ludlow and Orchard Sts. (358-1633)—The Belfast-born singer **Brian Kennedy** is in residency on Mondays in July. Kennedy is best known here for his starring role in the Broadway show "Riverdance," but on the other side of the pond he has a solid reputation as a singer and songwriter. In 1993 Van Morrison heard Kennedy's cover of "Celtic Ray" and liked what he heard so much that he asked to meet him. The two have collaborated, and Kennedy has had a string of hit records in Ireland. July 22: **Spacehog.** Led by the wonderfully named brothers Royston and Antony Langdon, this cheeky Britpop combo enjoyed a brief moment of glory in the mid-nineties for its singular ability to evoke the velvet-and-paisley chic of bands like T. Rex and Mott the Hoople.

BABY JUPITER
170 Orchard St. (982-2229)—The Washington, D.C.-based nine-piece band **Congregation** has opened for the likes of Jamiroquai, Kool and the Gang, and the Isley Brothers, and on July 22 they bring their high-test funk and soul to town.

BAM CAFÉ
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-636-4139)—July 21: Fridays in July belong to **Chocolate Genius** (born Marc Anthony Thompson), a vocalist with a gift for incisive personal narratives and an emotionally keyed-up delivery.

B. B. KING BLUES CLUB & GRILL
243 W. 42nd St. (997-4144)—July 20: When **Jorma Kaukonen** sets up on stage with nothing but a hollow-bodied Gibson guitar and his vast reservoir of American country-blues standards, he leaves behind his role as the former guitarist of Jefferson Airplane and founding member of Hot

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Tuna. To hear his glorious delivery of a song like Reverend Gary Davis's "I Am the Light of This World" or Mose Allison's "Parchman Farm" is to know where his true calling lies.

BOWERY BALLROOM
6 Delancey St. (533-2111)—July 22: **Blonde Redhead,** a trio that takes its name from a song by the No Wave group DNA. The three transplanted New Yorkers (one is from Japan, and the other two are twin brothers from Italy) eschewed the bass for a noisy guitar-and-drum approach that was, inevitably, compared to early Sonic Youth. But on their latest album, "Melody of Certain Damaged Lemons," the still bassless sound veers smartly, and rewardingly, toward pop.

BROWNIES
169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—July 21: Long Island's **Radio 4** does a fine job of updating the post-punk sounds of the Clash and Gang of Four. July 22-23: The shrapnel-laden assault of **Superchunk.** July 24-25: **Freeheat,** featuring former Jesus & Mary Chain guitarist Jim Reid.

FEZ
380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—July 24: **Mark Kozelek,** the soft-spoken songwriter for the impossibly delicate 4AD recording act Red House Painters. Kozelek recently completed a John Denver tribute album, "Take Me Home," as well as a solo release of his own material, "Rock 'n' Roll Singer." July 25-26: The fierce and uncompromising singer-songwriter **Toshi Reagon.** The **Mingus Big Band** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

GALAPAGOS
70 North 6th St., Williamsburg (718-782-5188)—July 21: **Big Lazy,** the elegantly gritty instrumental trio led by the extraordinary guitarist Stephen Ulrich. The band, which was formerly known as Lazy Boy until it lost a long-running battle with the La-Z-Boy corporation over its name, plays stunningly beautiful music that evokes everything from truckers' romps to the haunting film scores of Bernard Herrmann.

IRVING PLAZA
17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—July 20: Legendary blues-rock guitarist **Robin Trower** lights up the stage. ♦ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the Society, call 696-9737.

JOE'S PUB
425 Lafayette St. (539-8777)—July 19-21: **Sandra Bernhard.** The comedian, actress, model, high-heel advocate, and fashion correspondent (for this magazine) explores her musical-theatre leanings, backed by a five-piece rock band and suitably fearsome stilettos. July 22: **Diamanda Galás.**

KNITTING FACTORY
74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—July 20: **Betty.** This three-woman operation's act is a sort of cabaret gone haywire, with elements of funk and rock, performance art, satire, and standup comedy. Its latest release is the conceptual E.P. "Carnival," and this show promises to be a wild trip down the midway of the band's imagination. July 21: The **Re-Birth Brass Band** (see Concerts—Battle of the Brass Bands).

LAKESIDE LOUNGE
162 Avenue B, near 10th St. (529-8463)—July 22: Detroit's **André Williams,** a.k.a. Mr. Rhythm, started rapping in the age of transistor radios; since the late fifties he's been sweating out a strange body of funky music. July 24: **Freedy Johnston** has a knack for exacting folk rock with careful detail and piercing language.

MAKOR
35 W. 67th St. (601-1000)—July 19: **Lucy Kaplansky,** a self-proclaimed folk hybrid of Tammy Wynette and Elaine from "Seinfeld," is riding high on the success of "Ten Year Night," her most recent studio recording and the first since she dropped her New York City-based private psychology practice to sing full time. A truly gifted performer, Kaplansky burns through a bubbly, modest stage persona with strong flat picking and a bag full of enchanting songs.

MAXWELL'S
1039 Washington St., Hoboken (201-798-0406)—July 20: **Big Sandy and His Fly-Rite Boys** (see Concerts—Midsummer Night Swing). July 21: **Spacehog** (see Arlene Grocery). July 22: **Richard Thompson.** Many things have doomed this English troubadour to being an acquired taste, from his weedy croon to his knotty guitar work to the dizzying anecdotes he indiscriminately releases during performance. But what keeps most people away from Thompson is his masterly gift for pouring salt on open wounds. July 24: Hoboken's finest, **Yo La Tengo.**

MERCURY LOUNGE
217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—July must be the time for aspiring Irish pop stars (see Arlene Grocery); Wednesdays this month belong to **Jack Lukeman,** a former auto mechanic turned Emerald Isle pop phenom. Lukeman, a noirish balladeer reminiscent of Nick Cave who has described his performances as "adrenaline, testosterone-fuelled stupidity," has been twice voted Dublin's sexiest man. Expect a melodramatic, over-the-top show featuring songs from his album "Metropolis Blue," which was recently released here on the Razor & Tie label.

TONIC
107 Norfolk St. (358-7503)—July 21-22: **Arto Lindsay's** motto is simple: Have detuned guitar, will deconstruct. Brazilian music happens to be his favorite subject. On his latest release, "Prize," he's turned up both the drum and bass and his trademark skronk guitar, and he's allowed his placid bossa-nova experiments to unravel into the bumptious racket of full-blown samba.

TABLES FOR TWO

HELL'S KITCHEN
679 Ninth Ave., at 47th St. (977-1588)—At this *nuevo*-fangled cantina, there's about as much nostalgia for tamales and tacos as there is for the slaughterhouses and gang warfare that earned the eponymous neighborhood its reputation so many years ago. Hell's Kitchen is still gritty, though, so the pretty café is like a colorful, candlelit oasis; glimpsed through the floor-to-ceiling front window, the rattling taxis and motley crowd outside play like a distant movie.

It's hip in here, and so is the food. The chef, Sue Torres, has a modern touch with traditional ingredients which gives them a worldly air. Her crunchy chayote-and-portobello-mushroom roll in chipotle sauce is like an eggroll that went a little crazy one night and woke up south of the border. The ancho-marinated shrimp with coconut rice seems imported from Thailand. And the grilled pork loin with chili sauce and a pineapple *tamal* would be good luau food. Torres has a way with the lighter, sauced-and-drizzled dishes (you could make a great meal out of three orders of the rare-tuna tostada appetizers), and she also knows how to grill a steak. Hers comes topped with a shallot confit and accompanied by bitter dandelion greens and a slab of mellow sweet-and-white potato gratin. Since the restaurant is only three months old, there are still a few misfires: the mushroom-and-potato relleno is a bore, and among the mostly terrific quesadillas (the chili-rubbed lamb version is surprisingly good), one is so overloaded with fennel it tastes like Good & Plenty.

The service has a few kinks, too. The distracted hostesses can't seem to get the reservation policy straight (they don't take them for parties of fewer than six, but that empty table of four is being "saved" for people who are not you), and waiting at the bar can feel like purgatory. But the place makes up for such lapses with a connoisseur's collection of mescal and tequila and a list of exquisite desserts. There is no irritation that can't be assuaged with a serving of Torres's coconut flan. (Open daily for dinner. Entrées $13-$18.)

—*Emily Nunn*

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

BLUE NOTE
131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through July 23: **Baden Powell** solo and the **Leo Gandelman** quintet. The legendary Brazilian guitarist Powell represents an authentic slice of bossa-nova history. / Saxophonist Gandelman gleefully incorporates the antic notions of free jazz into the tropical mix.

IRIDIUM
48 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through July 23: The **Javon Jackson** quartet. Jackson doesn't want for experience. The agile tenorman has been one of Art Blakey's elite jazz messengers, an associate of the great Betty Carter, and, on his own adventurous recordings, an inspired interpreter of the likes of Santana, Serge Gainsbourg, Muddy Waters, and Frank Zappa. In other words, he brings more to the table than your average neo-bopper. Mondays belong to electric-guitar innovator **Les Paul.**

JAZZ STANDARD
116 E. 27th St. (576-2232)—A big man with lungs to match, **Kevin Mahogany** (through July 23) shouts blues, croons ballads, scats bebop, and does everything else a jazz singer has to do to qualify as well rounded in the late twentieth century. Dining.

UP OVER JAZZ CAFÉ
351 Flatbush Ave., at Seventh Ave., Brooklyn (718-398-5413)—July 21-22: The **Benny Powell** quintet. Trombonists bred in big bands the way Powell was aren't to be taken lightly. Having come up with Count Basie, Powell knows the value of clarity and the majestic force of the blues.

VILLAGE VANGUARD
178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through July 23: Saxophonist **Gary Bartz's** quartet has long been a hidden jewel in the jazz community: an incredibly sleek and impassioned unit driven by the experienced leader's sweeping alto and soprano playing and the elegant drumming of **Greg Bandy.** For this prestigious engagement, Bartz expands his small unit to a sextet, by including violinist **John Blake** and guitarist **Paul Bollenback.** The **Vanguard Jazz Orchestra** holds sway on Mondays.

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. (879-5500)—Mention eighteenth-century French painting to most people and they will think of the rosy coquetries of Boucher or Fragonard. But, unlike his peers, Jean-Siméon Chardin devoted himself to simple still-lifes and domestic scenes, creamy works of such beauty that the philosopher Diderot was moved to write, "The magic is incomprehensible." The painter captures his human subjects in moments of quiet reverie, and the show casts a similar spell. The still-lifes contain a surprising amount of dead game (after all, the French for "still-life" is "*nature morte*"), and the most influential example, surely, is "The Ray." The gutted fish with the ghoulish grin inspired copies by Van Gogh and Cézanne; Soutine's variation on the theme is on view downstairs in the "Painters in Paris" show. But this early work, which earned the young artist membership in the prestigious Académie Royale, is a rare example of Chardin as showoff. On the whole, his work is marked by a grace and dignity that reveal the miraculous in the everyday. Through Sept. 3. ♦ **"Other Pictures: Vernacular Photographs from the Thomas Walther Collection."** The great American photographer Alfred Stieglitz once warned amateur shutterbugs, "Don't believe you became an artist the instant you received a gift Kodak on Christmas morning." But, as this selection of black-and-white snapshots demonstrates, sometimes luck beats skill and art wins out. Most of the photographs were discovered at flea markets; many could easily pass for work by masters like Henri Cartier-Bresson, Walker Evans, or Diane Arbus. A happy accident,

like the pictures themselves. Through Aug. 27. ♦ It's the Fourth of July all summer long at **"Fireworks!: Four Centuries of Pyrotechnics in Prints and Drawings,"** an exhibition from the museum's permanent collection. The explosive entertainment on view includes images of sixteenth-century reënactments of military victories and the opening of the Brooklyn Bridge. Some of the best works focus not on the fireworks themselves but on the audience reactions, including Honoré Daumier's snarky family of three caught in a Parisian downpour and Winslow Homer's enraptured crowd in Central Park. Through Sept. 17. ♦ **"American Modern, 1925-40: Design for a New Age."** Through Jan. 7. ♦ **John Singer Sargent: Beyond the Portrait Studio."** Paintings, drawings, and watercolors from the collection. Through Sept. 24. ♦ **"Now! Modern Photographs from the Permanent Collection."** Through Oct. 22. ♦ **"After Nicolas Poussin: New Etchings by Leon Kossoff."** Through Aug. 13. ♦ **"Art and Oracle: Spirit Voices of Africa."** Through July 30. (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:30, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 9.)

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—**"Projects 72: John Armleder/Piotr Uklański"** presents two installations based on disco theatrics: Armleder has hung and spotlit a dozen whirling mirrored balls in the MOMA café, and Uklański has set up a sound-activated, illuminated dance floor in the sculpture garden. Through Sept. 5 and Aug. 1, respectively. ♦ **"Making Choices."** The twenty-four-part show concentrates on works made between 1920 and 1960, drawn exclusively from the museum's extensive holdings, in a series of tightly focussed exhibitions, several devoted to a single artist (Man Ray, Cartier-Bresson, Morandi). Closing, in stages, on Aug. 22, Sept. 19, and Sept. 26. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, and Thursdays, 10:30 to 5:45; Fridays, 10:30 to 8:15.)

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
Fifth Ave. at 89th St. (423-3500)—**"1900: Art at the Crossroads"** reopens a sort of art-world time capsule, contrasting representative works from the movements that took shape at the beginning of the past century. Established masters (Bouguereau, Burne-Jones, Degas, Eakins, Gauguin, and Munch) are displayed near the upstarts of the day (Kandinsky, Matisse, Mondrian, and Picasso). Through Sept. 10. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 9 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 8.)

WHITNEY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ART
Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-3676)—**"The Art of Alice Neel."** The artist (1900-84) enjoyed little critical success for most of her career, which took her from Cuba to Greenwich Village to Spanish Harlem before landing her a guest spot with Johnny Carson in the seventies. Neel had long turned to friends and family as subjects (one of the show's highlights is an early portrait of bohemian gadfly Joe Gould which gives new meaning to the phrase "well endowed"). But in the late fifties, allegedly at the suggestion of her therapist, she began inviting art-world figures like poet-critic Frank O'Hara and then-painter Robert Smithson to sit for her, donning the mantle of artist's artist. The tidal wave of Abstract Expressionism had crested, and the renewed interest in the figure worked to the advantage of an artist who had never veered from realism. Neel's warts-and-all approach is a far cry from the glamourizing of that other great American portraitist, Sargent, but, while her portraits rarely flatter the sitter, their intensity and intimacy are unrivalled. Through Sept. 17. ♦ **"Carnival Strippers: Photographs by Susan Meiselas."** Through Sept. 10. (Open Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 9.)

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY
Central Park W. at 79th St. (769-5100)—The Triassic equivalent of professional wrestling is here: **"Fighting Dinosaurs"** showcases one of the greatest paleontological finds of the past century. In the Gobi Desert almost thirty years ago, a Polish-Mongolian team came across the remains of two dinosaurs, a carnivorous velociraptor and a vegetarian protoceratops, apparently caught in a brawl to the death. More recent finds, including early mammals and new links between dinosaurs and birds, are also on view, along with video projections, a diorama, and chip-away re-creations of digs. Through Oct. 29. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

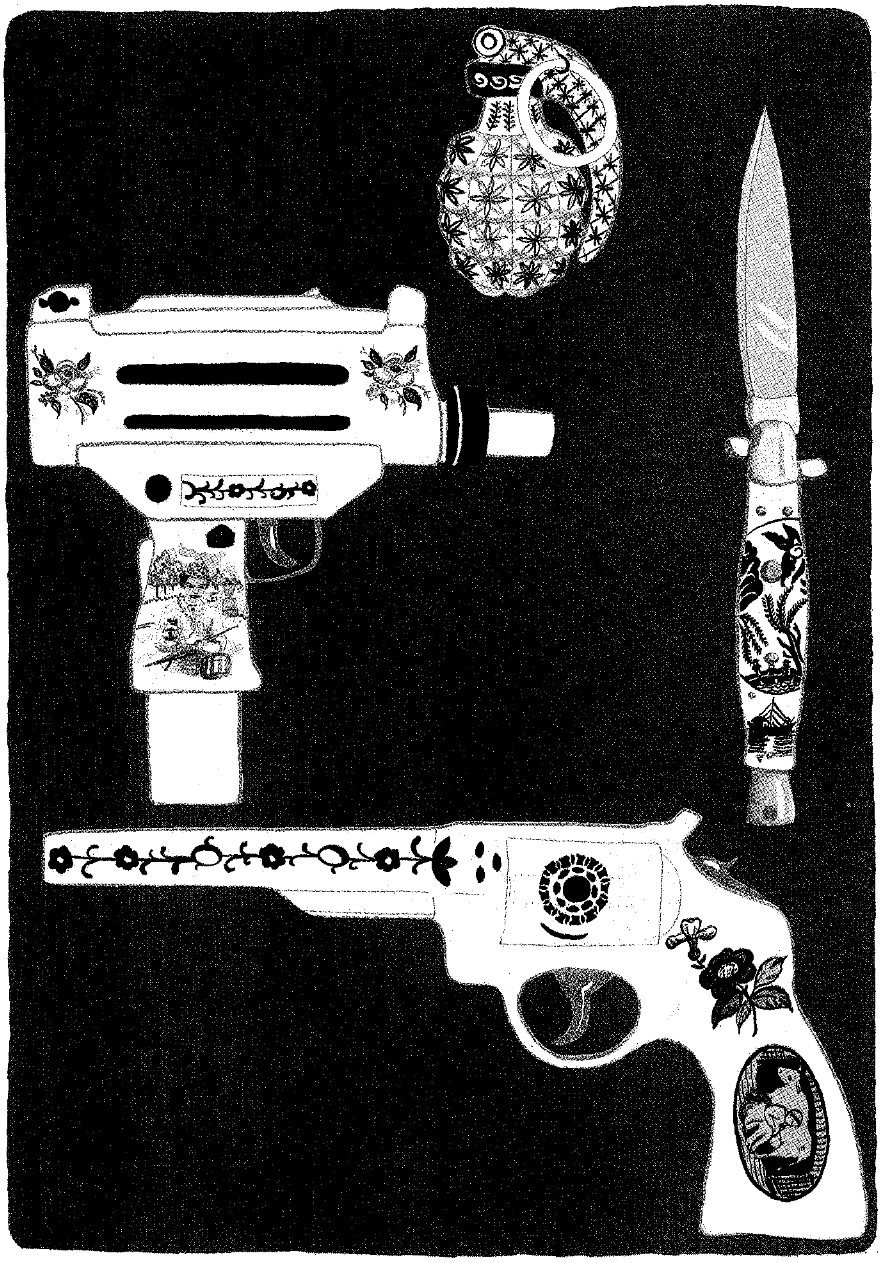
BROOKLYN MUSEUM OF ART
Eastern Parkway (718-638-5000)—Besides being the charismatic teacher of Hopper and O'Keeffe, among others, William Merritt Chase is remembered as the top-hatted dandy who inaugurated American Impressionism in Long Island's Shinnecock Hills. Before he moved there, in 1890, however, Chase spent five summers in Brooklyn, painting plein-air landscapes of Prospect Park, Gowanus Bay, and other sites. On display not far from where they were painted, these thirty-five small, spacious oils and pastels show women from another era strolling around familiar lawns and ponds. Part of the fascination of the show is in Chase's own stylistic vacillation between sketchy, gray tone poems and grassy, sunstruck reportage. On a cloudy day, Chase was Whistler; on a sunny one, he was Pissarro. Through Aug. 13. ♦ **"Dream Days: The Art of Maxfield Parrish."** Through Aug. 6. (Open Wednesdays through Fridays, 10 to 5; Saturdays and Sundays, 11 to 6.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Summer hours: unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Mondays through Fridays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.

ROBERT ARNESON
Two shows offer a welcome reminder of the West Coast sculptor's disciplined goofiness. The selection of late bronzes at Adams includes "I Have My Eyes on Me Endlessly," an infectiously self-indulgent spoof of Brancusi's "Endless Column," as well as a slapstick bench commissioned by the artist's home town of Benicia, California. In a more sombre mode, a monumental grimacing head and a suite of large drawings memorialize the artist's ambivalent feelings about chemotherapy. At Parrasch, a dozen earlier ceramic self-portraits show Arenson clowning, scowling, and smiling, usually with a theatrical cigar perched between his lips. At Adams (41 W. 57th St.; 644-5665) through Aug. 8; at Parrasch (20 W. 57th St.; 246-5360) through July 21.

"BLOWN AWAY"
A five-person show featuring the unlikely pairing of weaponry and handicrafts. Richard Notkin's



Charles Krafft's "Porcelain War Museum Project," in the "Blown Away" show, at Clark.

LARA TOMLIN

meticulous tile work, "The Gift," depicts an atomic-bomb test blast on the Bikini atoll in more than a thousand clay squares. The show's standout is Charles Krafft's "Porcelain War Museum Project," which re-creates the sidearms, pistols, and hand grenades of the Balkan conflict in delicate ceramics, displayed on red velvet or carved-wood stands and decorated in delft style with faux-pastoral designs—a milkmaid, a wild rose, a white-gloved maiden waving over the legend "Been There Smashed That." Through Aug. 12. (Garth Clark, 24 W. 57th St. 246-2205.)

"CONSTRUCTION SITE"
Capitalizing on the artists' flamboyant, neo-rococo energy, this small show of works by John Chamberlain, Frank Stella, and Judy Pfaff proves that formalist abstraction can feel as festive as a street fair. The earliest work, a big, crumpled chunk of galvanized steel called "Crushed Hors d'Oeuvre," by Chamberlain, is the only monochromatic piece; everything else glitters with gaudy, violently saturated hues. The Pfaffs, especially—giddy explosions of plastic fruit and beach-ball-like spheres—are a perfect pick-me-up for a listless summer day. Through July 28. (Ameringer Howard, 41 E. 57th St. 935-1110.)

"RECONFIGURATION"
A pair of brightly colored paintings by Trevor Winkfield and Michael Bevilacqua start this exhibition with a whimsical flourish. What follows is an eclectic sampling of figurative (but decidedly nontraditional) paintings, thoughtfully selected and installed. The Winkfield/Bevilacqua pairing, for example, reminds us that beneath their strikingly similar Pop-flavored palettes are very different sensibilities: Winkfield is looking over his shoulder at medieval heraldry; Bevilacqua at Times Square. Further matchups highlight the scrawled draftsmanship of A. R. Penck and Jean-Michel Basquiat and the sexual innuendo of David Salle and Sue Williams. There's no real theme here, but plenty of pleasantly off-kilter connections. Through July 21. (Danese, 41 E. 57th St. 223-2227.)

Short List

BETSABÉE ROMERO
Galeria Ramis Barquet, 41 E. 57th St. 644-9090. Through Sept. 1.

DONALD SULTAN
Mary Ryan, 24 W. 57th St. 397-0669. Through July 28.

GALLERIES–CHELSEA

"BOUNDLESSLY VARIOUS AND EVERYTHING SIMULTANEOUSLY"
This beautifully installed show was curated by the multitalented Peter Nagy, an artist and gallerist who divides his time between Delhi and New York. Indian artists and Westerners working on the subcontinent share equal billing (one of the stars of the show, Jeffrey Schiff, hails from Brooklyn). There is an over-all rhythm of ritual to the works on view, most gracefully present in Schiff's installation of Ayurvedic soaps carved in the shape of Tamil letters, laid humbly on the gallery floor. Viewers are invited to wash with the soap in one of the accompanying brass bowls while repeating a sacred chant. *Om shanti.* Through July 21. (Bose-Pacia Modern, 508 W. 26th St. 989-7074.)

"GAME ON"
The Sara Meltzer Gallery goes yard in a group show organized around the theme of sports. Soccer hooligans could take a cue from Jason Dodge's elegant approach to the game: in "She Is Kissing Just for Practice" (a kiss is a soft kick in soccer parlance), he presents a winsome array of evocative objects—blades of grass, a badminton birdie, a chocolate wrapper—nestled in a scaled-down goal. Alix Lambert, a stunner in real life who's a dead ringer for Bridget Fonda, bears a disturbing resemblance to Knicks coach Jeff Van Gundy in her self-portrait. Most impressive is Karen Kimmel's eye-catching conflation of art and commerce—a pitch for whimsical seasonal sports (lumber sports for spring, board games for fall, etc.), whose outfits and apparel are on sale at the gallery and at the artist-entrepreneur's Los Angeles boutique. Through July 28. (516 W. 20th St. 727-9330.)

"KOOL AID"
This playful exhibition opens with Amy Gatrell's row of rainbow-colored nooses (in case you missed the Jonestown punch reference in the show's title). With five pieces, painter David Korty dominates the proceedings: in his breezy acrylics of the Los Angeles landscape, his touch is so light he actually makes a city dump appealing. Through July 29. (Greene Naftali, 526 W. 26th St. 463-7770.)

"TWO FRIENDS AND SO ON"
A gleefully cavalier chain-link group show, organized by artists Jonathan Horowitz and Rob Pruitt. The first artist invited into the show invites the second, and so on until the gallery's filled to capacity with fifteen pieces, at which point the sixteenth artist replaces the first. As of this writing, the show opened with Jim Krewson's painting of two friends, a smarmy Bavarian idyll with seventies small-screen idols Scott Baio and Willy Ames sporting rosy cheeks and lederhosen. Jennifer Cohen gets pyrotechnical with a crocodile made of joint compound, its back covered in ammonium chromate, the stuff of sparklers. When lit (a box of matches sits on the floor next to the croc) the orange material turns a reptilian green. Through July 28. (Kreps, 516A W. 20th St. 741-8849.)

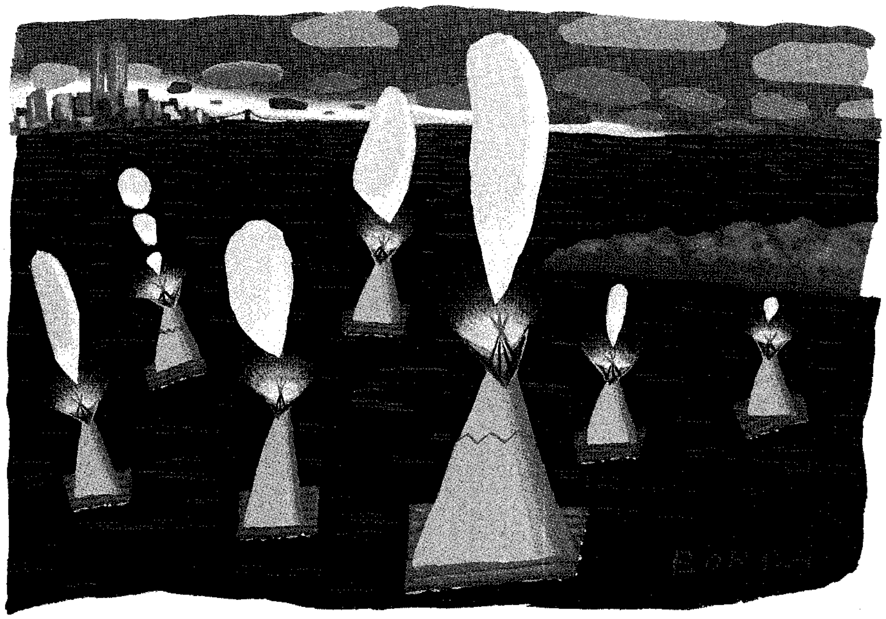
Short List

ROBERTO JUAREZ
Robert Miller, 524 W. 26th St. 366-4774. Through July 28.

FERNANDO RODRIGUEZ
Liebman Magnan, 552 W. 24th St. 255-3225. Through July 28.

NEW YORK HARBOR

"POWWOW"
Gregory Lee Pickard floats his version of a Native American village midway between Ellis and Liberty Islands. The seven teepees (made of wind-resistant plastic, not buffalo skins) on seven rafts can be observed from afar (especially at night, when they will be illuminated from within), at Liberty State Park or the Statue of Liberty, or arrangements can be made to motor by on a skiff that makes periodic tours of the maritime village, from July 15-23. (For more information, call 777-6249.)



Seven teepees float in New York Harbor, courtesy of the artist Gregory Lee Pickard.

JULIETTE BORDA

PHOTOGRAPHY

RUDY BURCKHARDT
This retrospective, prompted by Burckhardt's death last year, is mounted alongside a roomful of portraits of the artist by his friends, including Alex Katz and Red Grooms. Burckhardt's photographs of New York are simple, the work of a man who once offered "someone stepping off a curb" as an example of his ideal subject. His 1940 "Walking," a meditation on rayon, low heels, and concrete, places him with the best street photographers, while a pair of 1945 still-lifes, "Sir Walter Raleigh" and "Snail and Can Opener," prove that his deceptively informal compositions are the product of a skilled and thoughtful eye. Through July 28. (De Nagy, 724 Fifth Ave. 262-5050.)

ELLIOTT ERWITT
Erwitt is famous for making things funny. Over a long career, he has successfully maximized the potential for humor in dogs, sunbathers, and unwitting pedestrians. "Museum Watching" documents his lifelong interest in the dynamic between observers and works of art; the show includes photographs from the nineteen-fifties to the present, of sites as diverse as the pyramids of Giza, the Great Wall of China, the Louvre, and the American Museum of Natural History. Viewers can revel not only in its drollery but in the additional frisson of seeing themselves (or at least versions of themselves) represented. Through Aug. 11. (Houk, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. 750-7070.)

"COMPENDIUM"
Over the course of its first full year in business, Sepia has shown ten artists, whose work appears together here. Each has some tie to Asia, and many specifically to the Indian subcontinent, on which the affiliated Alkazi Collection is focussed. A useful introduction to this new venue. Through July 29. (Sepia Gallery and Alkazi Collection, 148 W. 24th St. 645-9444.)

"DEBUTS AND UPDATES"
Three strong women dominate this small group show: Carla Shapiro, who puts her black-and-white prints of weather and nature into repainted antique frames; Karen Halverson, whose color pictures of Lodore Canyon allude to early photography of the American West; and Alyson Denny, whose abstract "Horizontal Line Series" C-prints swim with pure color. Through Aug. 18. (Alan Klotz/Photocollect, 22 E. 72nd St. 327-2211. Closed Tuesdays.)

"INVITATIONAL"
For this three-man show, Alexandros Georgiou offers blurry blowups of pixies frolicking on desks

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and kitchen sinks, with production values so low you wonder why he bothered. Christopher Kendi poses, curly haired and smiley, waking up, shaving, smearing some green jelly on a piece of bread; the results are pleasantly goofy, and the color is brilliant, but Kendi comes off as a junior Roberto Benigni who has overstayed his welcome. In the back room, Roland Flexner shows endpaper-ready marbleized circles, created by the collapse of ink-tinted soap bubbles. Through July 21. (Curt Marcus, 578 Broadway. 226-3200.)

"UNCONSCIOUS DOCUMENTARIES"
It's a good deed (and often its own reward) to show new photographers in the summer, but parts of this roundup are more group therapy than group show. Lucas Michael photographs himself recollecting moments of joy and anguish but comes across like he's mugging for a screen test. Marianne Courville blows up her father's Super-8 frames until her childhood looks like a moment in the Zapruder film. Steed Taylor crosses himself out of family photos, a gesture that achieves resonance when accompanying literature reveals that he is H.I.V.-positive. Rising above this attention-hungry crowd, Evie McKenna and Danielle Mericle turn in handsome, lonely architectural shots. And Susan Jennings's microscopic photos of cultures from petri dishes left out at galleries are good for a laugh—you'll want to wear a surgical mask to the next Mathew Barney opening. Through July 21. (Von Lintel & Nusser, 555 W. 25th St. 242-0599.)

INTERNATIONAL CENTER OF PHOTOGRAPHY
1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. (860-1777)—**"Testimony"** surveys James Nachtwey's career as a documentary photographer from 1981 to the present. Through July 23. ♦ **"A Durable Memento"** presents daguerreotypes of places (Connecticut, Liberia) and people (John Brown) taken by Augustus Washington, the son of a former slave. Through Sept. 24. (Open Tuesdays through Thursdays, 10-5; Fridays, 10-8; Saturdays and Sundays, 10-6.)

Short List

W. EUGENE SMITH
Gallery 292, at 120 Wooster St.
431-0292. Through Aug. 12.

BENJAMIN SWETT
American Space, 1305 Madison Ave., at
92nd St. 426-2879. Through July 22.

"ARCHITECTURAL CONSTRUCTS IN CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY"
Saul, 560 Broadway. 431-0747.
Through Aug. 18.

"SNAPSHOTS"
Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. 794-4444.
Through July 21.

See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the Whitney Museum.

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

NEW YORK GRAND OPERA
Vincent La Selva, who is leading his company through a seven-season alfresco survey of all twenty-eight of Verdi's operas, faced a dilemma when the group's performance of "Un Ballo in Maschera" was cut short by a storm late last month. They'd gotten through the middle of the last act, which the musicians' union says is enough to qualify as a full performance. But technicalities aside, the rain-shortened performance wasn't *really* full, and La Selva figured he should make good on the complete program, given the exhaustive mandate of his mission. As a result, the last two scenes of "Un Ballo in Maschera" will surface this evening as a sort of prologue to a full staging of "La Forza del Destino." The "Forza" production is a curiosity even on its own, since La Selva's troupe is offering it in the rarely performed original version, heard at its 1862 première, in St. Petersburg, as opposed to the better known La Scala revision of 1869. "Forza"-philes will be sure to notice that several familiar passages are missing, that some material occurs in an unusual order, and that the ending takes a surprising turn. (Central Park SummerStage, Rumsey Playfield, mid-Park at 72nd St. July 19 at 6. No tickets necessary.)

ORCHESTRAS

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC
July 21 at 8: In the final installment of Lincoln Center Festival 2000's Messiaen celebration, Hans Vonk leads the orchestra in a single huge work: the "Turangalîla-symphonie," completed in 1948 as a ten-movement rumination on Hindu conceptions of transcendent love. Pianist Andreas Haefliger and ondes Martenot player Valérie Hartmann-Claverie are featured in the work's important solo parts. (Avery Fisher Hall. 721-6500.) ♦ July 24 at 8: A free, outdoor concert in which André Raphel Smith conducts Glinka's "Ruslan and Ludmila" Overture, Corigliano's "Elegy," Copland's "Four Dance Episodes from Rodeo," and Shostakovich's Symphony No. 5. (Great Lawn, Central Park. In case of rain, the concert will be held on July 25 at 8.)

MANHATTAN CHAMBER ORCHESTRA
Trinity Church's "Make Mine Mozart" series continues as Richard Auldon Clark conducts the Symphony No. 25 and the Clarinet Concerto (featuring Igor Begelman). (Broadway at Wall St. July 20 at 1. No tickets necessary.)

RECITALS

"MUSIC IN THE GARDEN"
The outdoor series in the courtyard of the Church of the Holy Trinity continues, with violinist Jorge Avila, cellist Allen Alexander, and pianist Steven Huter performing piano trios by Debussy, Sibelius (in C Major), and Brahms (in C Minor). The last two are potentially heavy fare for a summer evening, so listeners may want to go easy on the knockwurst at the accompanying picnic supper. (316 E. 88th St. July 19 at 7:15. Admission by contribution.)

"ELECTRONIC EVOLUTION"
Lincoln Center Festival 2000 wraps up its survey of electronic and electro-acoustic music with a concert that focusses on the theremin, one of the most enduring sound producers from electronic music's pioneer days. The thereminist for this performance is Lydia Kavina, who is not only one of the leading practitioners of the instrument but also the great-niece and student of its inventor, Leon Theremin (or, in his native Russian, Lev Termen, with the accent on the second syllable). Steven M. Martin's 1992 documentary, "Theremin: an Electronic Odyssey," introduced many to this inventor's bizarre life, which included not only acoustic experiments but also—it appears—an unwilling involvement in international espionage. The instrument that would make him famous appeared in 1920, under the name Aetherphon, and became quickly anointed as the sine qua non for spooky soundtracks. Ms. Kavina here plays several theremin solos and is joined by the Ensemble Sospeso (conducted by Jeffrey Milarsky) for Howard Shore's Suite from the movie "Ed Wood," Miklós Rózsa's "Spellbound Concerto," and new pieces by Olga Neuwirth and Christian Wolff. (Ethical Culture Society, 2 W. 64th St. July 19 at 8. For information about tickets, call 721-6500.)

PIANISTS AT MANNES
The Mannes College of Music reaches the final concerts of a two-week study institute for keyboard players. July 19 at 8: Faculty members Vladislav Kovalsky, Jerome Rose, and Mykola Suk are joined by colleagues for a program of solo and ensemble works. The concert concludes with two pieces that require the sort of shoulder-rubbing more typical of a rush-hour subway than of a recital hall: Czerny's "Variations Brillantes" for piano six-hands and Smetana's Rondo for piano eight-hands. ♦ July 22 at

BOOK CURRENTS

Kingdoms, Magic and Otherwise

What better way to soothe a moody child than a trip to the amusement park? But amusement parks can have growing pains of their own. In **ONCE UPON AN AMERICAN DREAM** (Kansas), Andrew Lainsbury recalls the awkward infancy of Euro Disney, Disney World's Continental cousin. Lainsbury, who worked as Prince Charming during the park's rocky first year, describes the dismay of visitors over the no-alcohol policy and the surly demeanor of its employees. Disney is nothing if not tenacious, though, and with a new name (Disneyland Paris) and plenty of wine at the concession stands, the park has staged a comeback.

Disneyland Paris's crowning touch was an updated Space Mountain, the world's premier thrill ride back in 1995. It has since been eclipsed by even more futuristic amusements, like the Mad Cobra at Japan's Suzaka Circuitland. Scott Rutherford's **THE AMERICAN ROLLER COASTER** (MBI) furnishes a history of coaster design here at home, from its tamer nineteenth-century origins to advances like the loop-the-loop.

Rutherford's book ends with a look at the resurgence of wooden coasters; when it comes to vintage rides, Coney Island's Cyclone sets the standard. The heyday of the ride is resurrected in Edo McCullough's **GOOD OLD CONEY ISLAND** (Fordham). First published in 1957 and reissued with a new introduction and epilogue, McCullough's account sweeps through Coney's wild history: its seamy beginnings, when the beach teemed with "till-tappers" and "moll-buzzers"; the champagne-and-horse-racing era at the turn of the century; and the rise of Steeplechase Park in the nineteen-twenties, with its freak shows and hot dogs. Though only a few attractions remain today, Coney Island will always be, in McCullough's words, the place "where America learned to play."

—*William Cohen*

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by Anne Rivers Siddons

Can Lytton, Georgia handle a quirky, outspoken, carefree woman who smokes cigarettes and drives a racy pink Thunderbird? It's 1961, and Nora Findlay's a new face in a small town. Taking a job at the local high school seems a sure cure for stopping the tongues from wagging, but motherless thirteen-year-old Peyton McKenzie sees something dark haunting Nora under her bright exterior, something she can't escape, something so devastatingly shocking that Lytton and Peyton will never be the same. (HarperCollins)

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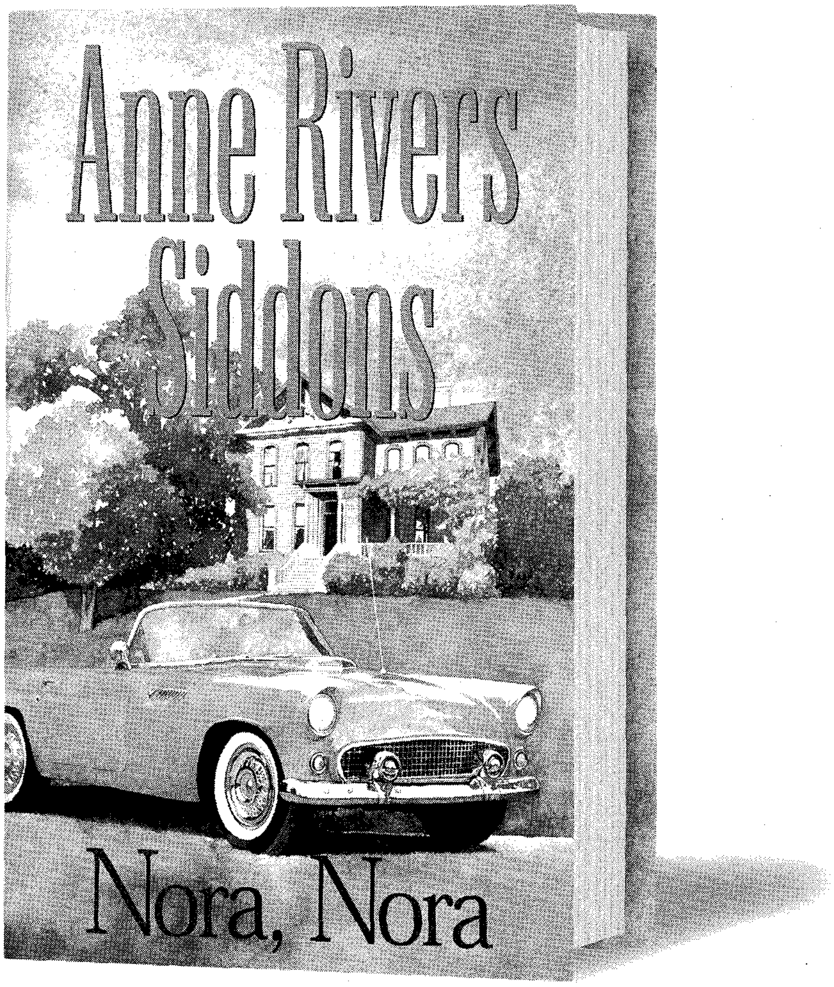

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8: Anton Kuerti was born in Austria, grew up in the United States, and has lived for the past three decades in Canada, which has decorated him as an Officer of the Order of Canada for his zeal in bringing great music to communities throughout that sparsely populated nation. Here he performs sonatas by Beethoven (in E-Flat Major, Op. 27, No. 1) and Schubert (in A Major, D. 959), in addition to five of Schumann's "Noveletten" (Op. 21). (Mannes College of Music, 150 W. 85th St. 580-0210, ext. 336.)

BARGEMUSIC
July 20-21 at 7:30: Presenting Puccini's "Crisantemi," for string quartet, and Mendelssohn's early, ebullient Piano Sextet, among other works. ♦ July 22 at 7:30 and July 23 at 4: Pianist Alexander Peskanov performs Beethoven's Thirty-two Variations in C Minor, Prokofiev's Sonata No. 3, and two Schubert Impromptus; colleagues assist him in Brahms's Piano Quintet. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 718-624-4061.)

WORKS BY MEREDITH MONK
She sings, she dances, she interacts with film; she gurgles, gasps, and groans; whispers, whines, and whistles; masticates and ululates. Lincoln Center Festival 2000's Monk retrospective concludes with two evenings featuring Ms. Monk and her ensemble. July 21 at 8: Selections from her opera "ATLAS," featuring the same singers who introduced the work in 1991, at Houston Grand Opera. (Alice Tully Hall.) ♦ July 23 at 8: Ms. Monk performs excerpts from "Our Lady of Late," a 1972 solo for voice with wineglass, in an evening that also includes screenings of two of her silent films: the seven-minute "Ellis Island" and an excerpt from her 1976 opera, "Quarry." (LaGuardia Concert Hall, Amsterdam Ave. at 65th St. For information about tickets to either event, call 721-6500.) ♦ **Note:** Several of Ms. Monk's films will also be screened this week at Makor, 35 W. 67th St. July 19 at 7:30 and 9:30 and July 23 at 2:30 and 4:30: "Ellis Island" and "Book of Days." ♦ July 20 at 7:30 and 9:30: Short films and videos. (For information about film tickets, call 601-1000.)

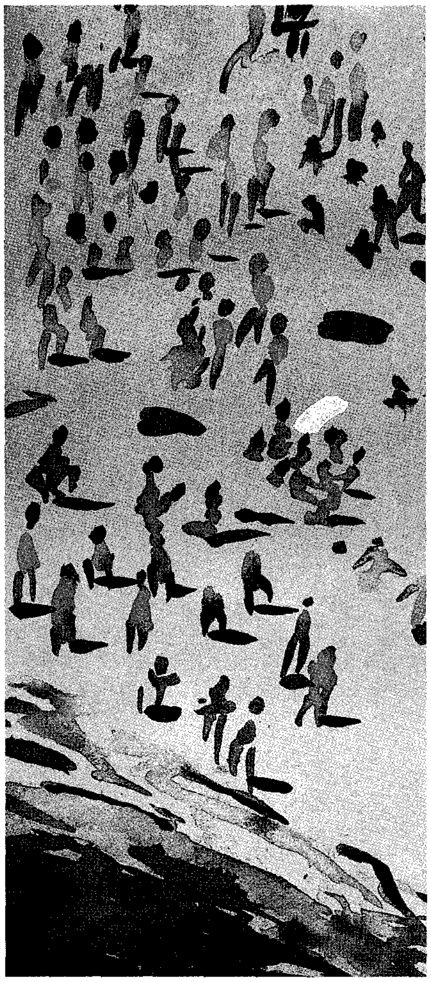
ABSOLUTE ENSEMBLE
Kristjan Järvi oversees this electro-acoustic group in Steve Reich's "Clapping Music" and Stravinsky's "A Soldier's Tale," as well as jazz and Latin selections. (Joe's Pub at the Public Theatre, 425 Lafayette St. July 24 at 8:30. 239-6200.)

OUT OF TOWN

A selective listing of festival events within a reasonable drive from New York City.

NEWPORT MUSIC FESTIVAL
The catalogue of Camille Saint-Saëns is long overdue for an exploration, and this summer Newport leads the way by presenting two hundred and twenty-five of his works, including all of his songs, piano pieces, and chamber works. It adds up to nearly a century of musical history, since he began composing at the age of six and continued right through until his death, in 1921, at the age of eighty-six. Countless other figures claimed more groundbreaking achievements during that span, but Saint-Saëns was hardly a lightweight—French audiences often gave him grief for being too "Germanic"—and he certainly deserves to be appreciated for works apart from "The Carnival of the Animals," "Danse Macabre," and a handful of concertos. Each of the following Saint-Saëns concerts features a different program of vocal and chamber works, in several of the city's Gilded Age "cottages." (July 19-20 at 4. Ochre Court. ♦ July 21 at 2. Belcourt Castle. ♦ July 21 at 5. The Elms. ♦ July 22-23 at 5:30. Marble House.) ♦ Other highlights of the festival's concluding week include a recital by the Croatian pianist Kemal Gekić. (Rosecliff, July 19 at 9, following a gala dinner at 6:30); music by Saint-Saëns's Spanish contemporaries (Belcourt Castle, July 21-22 at 11 A.M.); and a recital by violinist Ida Haendel and pianist Jonathan Feldman, including works by Bach and Beethoven (the Breakers, July 23 at 9). (Newport, R.I. 401-849-0700.)

TANGLEWOOD
July 19 at 8:30: James Conlon conducts the Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra in Mahler's Symphony No. 5. ♦ July 21 at 8:30: A three-day succession of Boston Symphony concerts begins as Jeffrey Tate leads Wagner's "Siegfried Idyll," Schumann's Piano Concerto (with Hélène Grimaud), and Haydn's Symphony No. 99. ♦ July 22 at 8:30: Mr. Conlon conducts Schoenberg's "Verklärte Nacht" and several orchestral items by Wagner, and soprano Barbara Bonney is featured in Mozart's motet "Exsultate, Jubilate." ♦ July 23 at 2:30: The pianist Peter Serkin, a stellar champion of new music, has been especially generous in his advocacy of composer Peter Lieberson, who has written several solo pieces and two concertos for Serkin. "The Red Garuda" is the second. Unveiled last autumn, it's one of Lieberson's ongoing musical depictions of the elements as described by Buddhist philosophy. The piece, he reports, was inspired by a dream in which the red Garuda (the Garuda being a giant, bright-hued, mythical bird) carried him over landscapes of fire, water, and earth. Serkin will bring the piece to Carnegie Hall next March, but listeners can get a foretaste in this concert, conducted by Seiji Ozawa. Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 5 rounds out the program. (Lenox, Mass. 888-266-1200.)



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CARAMOOR
July 20 at 4:30: For music lovers free on a Thursday afternoon, a recital by pianist Stewart Goodyear, performing sonatas by Mozart (in A Major, K. 331) and Prokofiev (his Seventh), in addition to Chopin's Ballade No. 3 and Scherzo No. 3, and Goodyear's own "Variations on 'Eleanor Rigby.' " ♦ July 21 at 8: An all-Bach concert by the St. Luke's Chamber Ensemble, featuring soprano Heidi Grant Murphy in a performance of his Cantata No. 202. ♦ July 22 at 8: A semi-staged performance of Bellini's high-Romantic opera "Il Pirata," with Will Crutchfield leading a cast that includes sopranos Indra Thomas and Laura Danehower Whyte, tenors Bruce Fowler and Francisco Almanza, baritone Daniel Mobbs, and bass Valeriano Lanchas. ♦ July 23 at 4:30: The pianist Alicia de Larrocha, often cited as a Mozart interpreter, has receded into a generalized dullness in her performances of Classical repertoire, and her stage demeanor is far more stern than genial. Still, nearly three quarters of a century into her career, her technique remains firm (if schoolmarmish), and she can be counted on to deliver works from her native Spain with real enthusiasm. If, in this recital, her performances of sonatas by Mozart (in A Minor, K. 310) and Schubert (in A Major, D. 664) prove enervating, at least she's likely to rouse herself from interpretative torpor for Granados's "Valses Poeticos" (from "Cartas de Amor"), Montsalvatge's "Sonatine pour Ivette," and Turina's "Sanlucar de Barrameda." (Katonah, N.Y. 914-232-1252.)

MUSIC MOUNTAIN
July 21 at 8: The Hanoverian Ensemble, a period-instrument group directed by flutist John Solum, performs concertos by Handel, Vivaldi, Bach, Telemann, and Frederick the Great's flute teacher, Johann Joachim Quantz. ♦ July 22 at 8: The New Black Eagle Jazz Band, a ensemble in the New Orleans tradition. ♦ July 23 at 3: The Whitman String Quartet plays quartets by Verdi and Brahms (in C Minor), and colleagues assist in Tchaikovsky's string sextet, "Souvenir de Florence." (Falls Village, Conn. 860-824-7126.)

MAVERICK CONCERTS
July 22 at 8: The drummers of Woodstock Beat. ♦ July 23 at 3: The Miró String Quartet offers quartets by Mozart (in C Major, K. 170), Janáček (his First), and Dvořák (in A-Flat Major, Op. 105). (Woodstock, N.Y. 845-679-8217.)

GLIMMERGLASS OPERA
Two new productions are currently running in repertory. July 22 at 8 and July 24 at 2: "Salome," with a cast that includes soprano Elizabeth Byrne, mezzo-soprano Robynne Redmon, and tenor Kenneth Riegel; conducted by Stewart Robertson. ♦ July 23 at 2: "La Bohème," with soprano Kelley Nassief as Mimi; Mr. Robertson conducts. (Cooperstown, N.Y. 607-547-2255.)

ABOVE AND BEYOND

READINGS
July 19 at 7:30: By Layle Silbert, from her book "Free Thinkers: Two Novellas," about Eastern European Jewish immigrants after the First World War. (Barnes & Noble, 2289 Broadway. No tickets necessary.) ♦ July 24 at 8: By poets Richard Tayson, Joanna Sit, Coleman Hough, and Donna Frazier. (11th Street Bar, 510 E. 11th St. No tickets necessary.)

TALKS
July 20 at 7: Bill Twomey, author of "Images of America: East Bronx," takes a trip back to the early nineteen-sixties to talk about Freedomland, the Bronx's own amusement park. (Barnes & Noble, 290 Baychester Ave., the Bronx. No tickets necessary.) ♦ July 22 at 1: Gregory Bynum lectures on the history of the underground railroad in New York State. (Morris-Jumel Mansion, 65 Jumel Terrace. For more information, call 923-8008.)

WALKS
July 21 at 10: Explore the Financial District, including a tour of the New York Stock Exchange. (For more information, call 908-4110.) ♦ July 22-23 at 12:30: In New York, it's easy to forget pigeons aren't the only kind of bird. The two hundred and fifty acres of the New York Botanical Garden serve as a reminder, particularly during the "Baby Birds Fledge" walking tour led by naturalist Debbie Becker. From the Rock Garden to the Bronx River, Becker will narrate as mother eastern kingbirds, northern orioles, and night herons teach their newly fluttering nestlings how to catch snacks and meals. (For more information, call 718-817-8700.) ♦ July 23 at 1: Take a multi-ethnic eating tour through the Jewish East Side, Chinatown, and Little Italy. (For more information, call 439-1090.)

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MOVIES OPENING

ALICE ET MARTIN
A drama written and directed by André Téchiné, about a male model (Alexis Loret) whose difficult childhood complicates his desire for a violinist (Juliette Binoche). In French. Opening July 21.

BENJAMIN SMOKE
Jem Cohen ("Instrument") and Peter Sillen directed this documentary about the life of Benjamin, a singer, songwriter, and speed freak who was a fixture in the Atlanta underground-music scene. Opening July 21. (The Screening Room.)

CRIMINAL LOVERS
A boy kills a classmate on a dare in this drama directed by François Ozon. With Natacha Régnier ("The Dreamlife of Angels"). In French. Opening July 21.

THE EYES OF TAMMY FAYE
RuPaul narrates this documentary about the televangelist Tammy Faye Bakker. Directed by Fenton Bailey and Randy Barbato. Opening July 21.

IN CROWD
Rich girls befriend a poor girl (Lori Heuring) and then turn on her when she attracts the attentions of the tennis pro (Matthew Settle), in this drama directed by Mary Lambert. Opening July 19.

LOSER
A nerdy college student (Jason Biggs) falls for a beautiful coed (Mena Suvari) who's in love with her professor. Directed by Amy Heckerling ("Clueless"). Opening July 21.

POKÉMON THE MOVIE 2000
Ash and his friends must stop Jirarudan from becoming the most powerful Pokémon trainer on the planet, in the second film featuring the incredibly popular little monsters. Opening July 21.

WHAT LIES BENEATH
Robert Zemeckis directed this supernatural thriller starring Harrison Ford and Michelle Pfeiffer. Opening July 21.

FILM NOTES

If a movie has been reviewed recently in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given.

THE ADVENTURES OF ROCKY AND BULLWINKLE
This reworking of Jay Ward's pun-happy cartoon mixes animation and live action, and some of it is amusing—Rene Russo, stalking around in purple, with matching eyeshadow and blush, is a heavenly nutcake—but the movie is so nervous and self-conscious that it rattles right off the screen. Robert De Niro, wearing a black scab of a wig and holding one finger aloft as he speaks, is fervently mirthless as Fearless Leader. Des McAnuff's direction looks like a particularly frenetic and inexpert form of traffic management.—*David Denby* (7/17/00) (84th Street Sixplex, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and 19th Street East 6.)

BUT I'M A CHEERLEADER
Natasha Lyonne—who stars in this O.K. comedy about a group of unfortunate gay teens at a "deprogramming" camp determined to "heterosexualize" them—certainly doesn't have the right people working for her. If she did, her agent and manager would realize what Lyonne should be doing: developing a bio-pic about the late, great comedienne Judy Holliday. Lyonne has the same impeccable timing, the same intelligence, and the same "How did I get here?" expression, which immediately overwhelms every movie she's in, including this one. And Eddie Cibrian, as Rock, the enticing, barely closeted son of the camp's director, also has an amazing presence.—*Hilton Als* (Angelika Film Center and Chelsea Cinemas.)

CHICKEN RUN
A full-length exercise in stop-motion animation, but don't be scared. Technically, this involves the microscopic manipulation of malleable figures, and the finished product comes across as a rebuke to Disney's recent cartoon blockbusters, where even the sharpest characters move in two dimensions and think in one. Nick Park improved the world with the introduction of the master-and-dog comedy duo Wallace and Gromit; now, in fellowship with Peter Lord, he has turned to chickens, most of whom maintain a Wallace-like width of grinning mouth. Our heroines are hens, living claw-to-beak on a repressive farm, whose owner plans to switch from egg production to chicken potpies. Enter a roaming rooster named Rocky, pumped with American cheer and graced with the voice of Mel Gibson. He will lead the ladies over the wire to pastures new. The result is bright and inventive, though it lacks the snap of earlier Park productions. In a summer strewn with films about courage, though, this one is high in the pecking order.—*Anthony Lane* (7/10/00) (Chelsea Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Orpheum VII, and Union Square.)

CHUCK & BUCK
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Angelika Film Center.)

CROUPIER
A slight and streamlined bauble from British director Mike Hodges, about a writer (Clive Owen) who takes a job as a roulette dealer, aiming, in the process, to write a best-seller about his experiences. The lean and twisted screenplay—nobody is what he seems—gives Hodges ample time to play with doppelgängers, duplicity, and lots of mirrors, and the sombre turns of the story and low-key performances are a welcome reminder that taut moviemaking can be as exciting as fast-paced editing and scorching pyrotechnics.—*Bruce Diones* (BAM Rose Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and The Screening Room.)

THE DECALOGUE
In 1988 and 1989, the Polish director Krzysztof Kieslowski made a series of ten films for Polish television, in which each movie, roughly an hour in length, was devoted to one of the Ten Commandments. The films, set largely around an apartment complex in Warsaw, are not so much literal illustrations of the commandments as fables inspired by them—very modern fables, it turns out, featuring relations between men and women, and parents and children, of a depth and intensity not seen since Ingmar Bergman stopped making movies in the early eighties.—*D.D.* (6/12/00) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

DISNEY'S THE KID
The grotesque title should tell you part of what's wrong. For the first half hour, the talented screenwriter Audrey Wells provides good, nasty dialogue for Bruce Willis, a self-dissatisfied Los Angeles image consultant who puts everyone else down. But this movie, whimsically directed by Jon Turteltaub, quickly turns into a limp fantasy of self-recognition—a therapy dream. The unhappy Bruce confronts his equally miserable eight-year-old self in the shape of an unfortunate round-faced actor named Spencer Breslin, a moaning pudge with a chipmunk smile. Together they travel backward, and Bruce relives his childhood traumas. While this apparently turns him into a life-loving grownup, some of us may long for the vicious put-down artist.—*D.D.* (7/17/00) (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema I, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, and Village East Cinemas.)

HAMLET
In this modern-dress version, the black towers of Times Square make a sinister and eloquent setting for the power struggles within the Denmark Corporation. The bedraggled Hamlet (Ethan Hawke), a slacker in a knit cap, recites "To be or not to be" in a video store and washes Polonius's blood-soaked clothes in a laundromat. Michael Almereyda, a young veteran of the New York independent scene, has developed his own form of visual poetry among the corporate settings and video screens, and many of the translations of Shakespeare into contemporaneity are both witty and oddly right.—*D.D.* (5/15/00) (Gotham Cinema.)

HUMANITÉ
An odd, slow, disturbing near-masterpiece set in Bailleul, in the north of France, where a sad-sack policeman named Pharaon (Emmanuel Schotté) investigates a sordid crime—the rape and murder of an eleven-year-old girl. The dim but empathic Pharaon lives with his mother and longs for Domino (Séverine Caneele), the big-boned factory worker and commonplace sex goddess who lives down the street. In form, the movie is a detective story, but we watch with increasing apprehensiveness as it dawns on us that Pharaon might be a kind of sluggish Oedipus, a sleuth who uncovers the traces of a crime that he has committed himself. The director, Bruno Dumont, works in Cinemascope, and the enormous, sharply focussed images breathe air and light and a richly suggestive stillness.—*D.D.* (6/12/00) (Film Forum.)

JESUS' SON
The new Alison Maclean film, adapted from the short stories of Denis Johnson, is her first offering since "Crush," and it maintains her careful interest in careless lives. Billy Crudup, who gets more interesting with every movie, plays a chronic drifter. He falls in love, roughly speaking, with a junkie (Samantha Morton); some of their scenes together are hard to watch, but Maclean's direction is more tender than indulgent, and the movie grips hardest when times are most raw. As the mood lifts and lightens in the second half, the blaze of the film dies down. Still, not since Robert Altman turned his attention to Raymond Carver has a director seemed so determined to master the ramshackle.—*A.L.* (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Union Square.)

KISS ME KATE
For the uninitiated, 3-D movies seem like a curious relic of the fifties, in a league with sock hops, the Soviet Union, and hula-hoop endurance contests. Once you do see a stellar 3-D movie like "Kiss Me Kate" projected in its original format, it's hard to understand why the technology has died away. Although it's not the most eye-popping example of the genre, this 1953 musical, adapted by George Sidney from Cole Porter's Broadway smash, provides plenty of stereoscopic tricks, beginning with Ann Miller's freewheeling performance of "Too Darn Hot," which sends a whole flotilla of red handkerchiefs flying toward the audience.—*Michael Agger* (Film Forum.)

ME, MYSELF & IRENE
In the latest gross-out comedy by the Farrelly brothers, Jim Carrey, a mild-mannered Rhode Island state trooper, represses so many hostile impulses that his personality splits in two—a new man pops out of him, a guy with a low bedroom voice and cool panther moves. Switching back and forth between the two characters, Carrey performs miracles with his face, teeth, groin, and elbows, but the switches are so frequent and arbitrary that Renée Zellweger, his charming co-star, doesn't have the time or the space to work up a coherent response to either man. The movie fails as romantic comedy and as narrative; it starts and stops, and after a while you forget why anyone is doing anything.—*D.D.* (7/3/00) (Chelsea Cinemas, East 86th Street Cinemas, Empire 25, First & 62nd Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Olympia I and II, 62nd & Broadway, and Union Square.)

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M:I-2

It should have been a treat. The director is John Woo, the man who took the gravity out of gunfights. The screenwriter is Robert Towne, who wrote half the movies that made Jack Nicholson a star, and the leading lady is Thandie Newton, whose face could make a thousand ships do pretty much anything she wants. But this much vaunted sequel to "Mission: Impossible," which deifies Tom Cruise and his indestructible physique, goes through the motions of the multinational action thriller, and the result is more gruelling than pleasurable.—*A.L.* (6/5/00) (84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, 19th Street East 6, Sutton 1 and 2, and Village Theatre VII.)

MONSIEUR HIRE

Patrice Leconte based this wan 1989 character study on the same Georges Simenon novel ("Monsieur Hire's Engagement") that inspired Julien Duvivier's classic 1946 thriller, "Panique." When a murder is committed in a petit-bourgeois Parisian neighborhood, Monsieur Hire becomes a suspect because he's considered a misanthrope and an oddball. He develops a crush on a new gal in town—who's actually the lover of the real killer. But where Duvivier used the martyrdom of a loner to excoriate a community ruled by rumor, Leconte crafts one of those art-house specials about voyeurism leading to true love. He homes in so relentlessly on Hire (Michel Blanc) and his romantic object, Alice (Sandrine Bonnaire), that the film becomes a two-character drama. Every time a bit player appears on screen, you keep hoping he or she will evolve into a character, and you feel like crying out, "Don't go!"—*Michael Sragow* (Museum of Modern Art; July 21 and July 23.)

NIAGARA

This isn't a good movie, but it's compellingly tawdry and nasty—the only movie that explored the mean, unsavory potential of Marilyn Monroe's cuddly, infantile perversity. It was made in 1953, just before she won Hollywood over with "Gentlemen Prefer Blondes," and her amoral, destructive tramp—carnal as hell—may represent Hollywood's lowest estimate of her.—*Pauline Kael* (Bryant Park; July 17.)

THE PATRIOT

A square but stirring and often absorbing epic about the Revolutionary War. Benjamin Martin (Mel Gibson), a South Carolinian who's a war lover hiding as a man of peace, goes into action when the British execute one of his sons. Martin refuses to play by the standard rules of warfare, in which opposing armies walk toward each other across open ground and then proceed to shoot at point-blank range; he organizes a guerrilla force that attacks out of the swamps. In response, the British commander, General Cornwallis (Tom Wilkinson), unleashes a sadistic subordinate, Colonel William Tavington (Jason Isaacs), who makes war against the American civilian population. At this point, the movie seems to jump right over the nineteenth century into the twentieth. We get ambushes, swordplay, skirmishes, battles, and family scenes, all generally well staged, with gravity and power, by the director Roland Emmerich.—*D.D.* (7/3/00) (Astor Plaza, Chelsea Cinemas, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Olympia I and II, Orpheum VII, 64th and 2nd, Union Square, and Waverly 1 and 2.)

THE PERFECT STORM

Man against the elements. Man is represented by George Clooney, which seems pretty flattering to the rest of us; he plays Billy Tyne, the captain of a fishing boat that set out from Gloucester, Massachusetts, in the fall of 1991. The elements are represented by a tempest of Shakespearean ferocity, although the Prospero in question was Industrial Light and Magic. What we see are humans being dwarfed by digital waves: a parable for our time. The story, based on Sebastian Junger's book, is true to life, give or take a few nautical miles and a bunch of dead dialogue, most of which goes to the women—headed by a weepy Diane Lane—left behind onshore. The screenwriter, Bill Wittliff, bends over backward to enliven the crew's relationships, but he basically falls overboard, and he's not helped by the need to tack back and forth from the starring vessel to a couple of bit boats, plus a passing helicopter. The director is Wolfgang Petersen, who got soaked in the line of duty as long ago as "Das Boot." For all the swell and spray, he has less to cling on to here. Junger's book, which was crammed with great stuff about gales and gutting, was perhaps not as adaptable as Hollywood liked to think.—*A.L.* (7/10/00) (Coronet Cinemas, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

RIFIFI

A quartet of thieves breaks into a jewelry store, and for a tense half hour we watch as they work, silently. The film is like a highly skilled documentary on how to disconnect a burglar alarm and open a safe, and it is thoroughly engrossing, because we see the criminals as craftsmen, and we celebrate their teamwork, their finesse, their triumph. Ironically, we find ourselves sympathizing with their honest exhaustion after their dishonest labor. From there on, this 1955 movie, made in France, by the American director Jules Dassin, follows the tradition of "Scarface," "Public Enemy," and "The Asphalt Jungle" (and of "Macbeth" before them), bringing the tragic, trapped figures to a cadaverous finish. Along the way, Dassin keeps things actively vicious, with glimpses of underworld prostitutes and hopheads and a murder, a kidnapping, and the thrashing of a faithless mistress, who is stripped. "Rififi" is the granddaddy of a batch of suspense films featuring how to knock over safes or break into banks and museums, but its own chief distinction is its nasty tone. In French.—*P.K.* (Film Forum.)

SCARY MOVIE

What makes this film a better than average sendup of the "Scream" genre of horror flick is its subtext: a black director, Keenen Ivory Wayans (the most visible member of the hilarious Wayans clan), has made an amiable farce of a movie that also shows what white fear onscreen looks like to a black audience: another example of white privilege. In one scene, the heroine, who is being stalked in her own home, pauses long enough to send an E-mail to her local police department which reads, "White woman in trouble." Seconds later, the police arrive. It's a visualization of an old Richard Pryor joke that hasn't gone stale because it's still true, even in the world outside movie theatres.—*H.A.* (Chelsea Cinemas, Cinema II, Cinema 3rd Avenue, 84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Orpheum VII, Union Square, and Waverly 1 and 2.)

SHAFT

His head shaved, his goatee minimalized (etched almost), and his body sheathed in black-on-black Armani, Samuel L. Jackson is a shaft all right, a walking blade of style. Until the movie collapses into an endless shoot-out, in which everyone in the tristate area allows himself to be blown away by the hero, this sequel to the 1971 film is mostly disreputable fun. Featuring an amazingly inventive performance by Jeffrey Wright as a Dominican drug dealer. Directed by John Singleton; written by Richard Price, Singleton, and Shane Salerno.—*D.D.* (7/3/00) (84th Street Sixplex, 42nd Street E Walk, Kips Bay Theatre, New York Twin, 19th Street East 6, Orpheum VII, and Village Theatre VII.)

SHOWER

In this lovely independent movie from China directed by Zhang Yang, a modern young fellow eager to make money comes home to the shabby Beijing neighborhood in which he grew up. At first, Da Ming (Pu Cun Xin) feels nothing but fear and disgust. He's bored by his elderly dad, who runs a musty old bathhouse, and frightened by his retarded brother, who loves the father and works happily amid the damp tiles. Groaning and complaining, men arrive every day to seek solace—the warmth of moisture, the laying on of hands. As far as Da Ming is concerned, the bathhouse is a home for the living dead, but he soon

Benjamin—the drag queen and speed addict whose eccentric songwriting and authentic freakhood captured the attention of Michael Stipe and Patti Smith—at home in the Atlanta neighborhood of Cabbagetown. A documentary about his life opens July 21.

gets drawn into the lulling rhythm of the place, and so do we. "Shower" is all about people taking care of one another, and, as such, its mood is bittersweet, since caring opens one to the pleasures of family love but also to the pain of disappointment.—*D.D.* (7/17/00) (Eastside Playhouse, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.)

STRANGERS ON A TRAIN
Hitchcock's bizarre, malicious 1951 comedy, in which Robert Walker brought sportive originality to the role of the chilling wit; it's intensely enjoyable—in some ways the best of the director's American films. It isn't often that people think about a performance in a Hitchcock movie; usually what we recall are the bits of "business"—the stump finger in "The 39 Steps," the windmill turning the wrong way in "Foreign Correspondent," etc. But Walker's performance is what gives this movie much of its character and its peculiar charm, and Raymond Chandler, who adapted the Patricia Highsmith novel of the same title, provides Hitchcock with some of the best dialogue that has ever graced a thriller.—*P.K.* (BAM Rose Cinemas; July 20.)

SUNSHINE
Stiff but continuously interesting and touching. The Hungarian director István Szabó, working with the American writer Israel Horovitz, uses the rise and fall of a large Jewish bourgeois family as the prism through which to view the last hundred years of Hungarian life. Ralph Fiennes plays the young man of the family in three successive generations—a patriotic judge, a champion fencer who is felled by anti-Semitism (in the film's best section), and an Auschwitz survivor who becomes a police interrogator in the Communist dictatorship. At its worst, the movie offers the slightly dolorous pleasures of leafing through a family photo album; at its best, it's exciting and heartbreaking, and it leaves an American viewer grateful for our banal but stable democracy.—*D.D.* (7/17/00) (BAM Rose Cinemas, Empire 25, 72nd Street East, and Union Square.)

TIME REGAINED
Only a fool, you suppose, would attempt to film Proust; in that case, Raoul Ruiz, the Chilean director, is a wise and delicate fool, especially since he elected to concentrate on the concluding volume of "In Search of Lost Time." There's no Swann, and not much of Proust's beloved Albertine (Chiara Mastroianni), but plenty of Odette (Catherine Deneuve), the Baron de Charlus (John Malkovich), and the haughty Saint-Loup (Pascal Greggory), plus enough of Gilberte (Emmanuelle Béart) to demonstrate why men and boys alike would throw their hearts, or their teacups, at her feet. The picture has a stately, waltz-like rhythm, as the narrator (Marcello Mazzarella, a dead ringer for the real Proust) guides us through the declining fortunes of his friends under the shadow of the First World War. There are the inescapable glances back into Proust's childhood, but the movie feels more companionable than cloistered. At times, both people and props start to shift and sway, as though on the deck of a ship; if you come out of the movie suffering from a mixture of nausea and nostalgia, then Ruiz can pride himself on a job well done. In French.—*A.L.* (6/19 & 6/26/00) (Cinema Village and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

TRIXIE
Alan Rudolph is, perhaps, the most uneven director who's ever worked in Hollywood, with the possible exception of his mentor Robert Altman. That this film, starring the cloying Emily Watson, should follow Rudolph's brilliant but messy "Mrs. Parker and the Vicious Circle" is something of a shock. Watson is a casino detective with a gift for malapropisms, investigating a murder involving a corrupt state senator (Nick Nolte), and Nathan Lane, Dermot Mulroney, and Will Patton round out the ensemble. Rudolph is too enamored of his characters' eccentricities to let them just be, which would let the audience to find out what's great or not great about them on their own. And any filmmaker who messes with Lesley Ann Warren's erotic energy should surrender his viewfinder to the Director's Guild of America.—*H.A.* (First & 62nd Cinemas and Village East Cinemas.)

MICHAEL ACKERMAN

X-MEN
Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. (Chelsea West, Empire 25, Murray Hill Cinemas, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 64th and 2nd, Village East Cinemas, and Ziegfeld.)

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Beekman, Empire 25, Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, and Quad Cinema.

THE FILTH AND THE FURY (4/3/00)
Art Greenwich Twin and Pioneer.

THE FIVE SENSES
Angelika Film Center, Empire 25, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.

GLADIATOR (5/8/00)
Art Greenwich Twin, East 85th Street, Empire 25, Lincoln Square, Murray Hill Cinemas, New York Twin, and Union Square.

HIGH FIDELITY (4/3/00)
Criterion Center and Empire 25.

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The Screening Room.

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THEATRE ADDRESSES

Unless noted, call 777-FILM for show times.

Angelika Film Center, 18 W. Houston St.
Art Greenwich Twin, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
Astor Plaza, 44th St. at Broadway.
BAM Rose Cinemas, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770).
Beekman, Second Ave. at 66th St.
Chelsea Cinemas, 260 W. 23rd St.
Chelsea West, 333 W. 23rd St.
Cinema I, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema II, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema 3rd Avenue, Third Ave. at 60th St.
Cinema Village, 22 E. 12th St. (924-3363).
Coronet Cinemas, Third Ave. at 59th St.
Criterion Center, Broadway at 44th St.
East 85th Street, First Ave. at 85th St.
East 86th Street Cinemas, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Eastside Playhouse, Third Ave. at 55th St.
84th Street Sixplex, Broadway at 84th St.
Empire 25, on 42nd St. near Eighth Ave. (398-3939).
59th Street East Cinema, 239 E. 59th St.
Film Forum, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
First & 62nd Cinemas, 400 E. 62nd St.
42nd Street E Walk, 42nd St. near Eighth Ave.
Gotham Cinema, Third Ave. at 58th St.
Kips Bay Theatre, Second Ave. at 32nd St.
Lincoln Plaza Cinemas, Broadway at 63rd St.
Lincoln Square, Broadway at 68th St.
Metro Cinema 1 and 2, Broadway at 99th St.
Murray Hill Cinemas, 160 E. 34th St.
New York Twin, Second Ave. at 67th St.
19th Street East 6, Broadway at 19th St.
Olympia I and II, Broadway at 107th St.
Orpheum VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
Paris, 4 W. 58th St. (688-3800).
Park & 86th Street Cinemas, 125 E. 86th St.
Pioneer, 155 E. 3rd St. (254-3300).
Quad Cinema, 34 W. 13th St.
The Screening Room, 54 Varick St. (334-2100).
72nd Street East, Third Ave. at 71st St.
64th and 2nd, Second Ave. at 64th St.
62nd & Broadway, 62 W. 62nd St.
State, Broadway at 45th St.
Sutton 1 and 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
Union Square, Broadway at 13th St.
Village East Cinemas, Second Ave. at 12th St.
Village Theatre VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
Waverly 1 and 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
Worldwide Cinemas, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
Ziegfeld, 141 W. 54th St.

REVIVALS, CLASSICS, ETC.

Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE
35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (718-784-0077)—Through Sept. 3: "Behind the Mirror," a series of films that portray the darker side of the fifties. July 22-23 at 2: "Touch of Evil" (1958, Orson Welles). ♦ July 22-23 at 4:30: "The Night of the Hunter" (1955, Charles Laughton). ♦ Classic movies. July 22-23 at 6:30: "Only Angels Have Wings" (1939, Howard Hawks).

ANTHOLOGY FILM ARCHIVES
32 Second Ave., at 2nd St. (505-5110)—July 20-23: "The Zanzibar Films," experimental work produced by a collective of French filmmakers between 1968 and 1970.

BAM ROSE CINEMAS
30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn (718-623-2770)—July 20 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "Strangers on a Train" (†). ♦ July 21 at 4:30, 7, and 9:30: "The Big Lebowski" (1998, Joel Coen). ♦ July 22 at 2, 5, and 8:30: "Portrait of a Lady" (1996, Jane Campion). ♦ July 23 at 2, 5:20, and 8:45: "My Sex Life . . . Or How I Got Into an Argument" (1996, Arnaud Desplechin; in French). ♦ July 24-25 at 7 and 9:30: A program of short films.

BRYANT PARK
Sixth Ave. at 42nd St. (521-5700)—Mondays, starting at dusk: free drive-in-style moviegoing. July 24: "Niagara" (†).

FILM FORUM
W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—July 21-Aug. 3 at 1, 3:20, 5:40, 8, and 10:10: A new print of the classic noir thriller "Rififi" (†).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. (708-9480)—The films of Patrice Leconte. All films are in French. July 20 at 6: "The Girl on the Bridge" (1999). ♦ July 21 at 6: "The Hairdresser's Husband" (1990). ♦ July 21 at 8 and July 23 at 2: "Monsieur Hire" (†). ♦ July 22 at 2 and July 23 at 5: "Ridicule" (1996). ♦ July 22 at 5: "Les Bronzés" (1978). ♦ Postwar films from the archives. July 21 at 6: "Strange Victory" (1948, Leo Hurwitz). ♦ July 22 at 5: "Laura" (1944, Otto Preminger). ♦ July 23 at 2: "Woman on the Beach" (1947, Jean Renoir; in French). ♦ July 23 at 5: "House of Strangers" (1949, Joseph L. Mankiewicz).

MUSEUM OF TELEVISION AND RADIO
25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Through Sept. 17: "The Adventures of Rocky and Bullwinkle and Friends," a retrospective of the classic cartoon. Tuesdays through Sundays at 12:15, Thursdays at 6, and Fridays at 7.

THE SCREENING ROOM
54 Varick St. (334-2100)—Blaxploitation films. July 14-15 at midnight: "Truck Turner" (1974, Jonathan Kaplan).

WALTER READE THEATRE
Lincoln Center (875-5600)—July 21-27: The New York Video Festival. July 21 at 6:30 and July 22 at 9:30: "Beaver Trilogy" (1980-1998, Trent Harris). ♦ July 21 at 9 and July 23 at 5:30: "Only Disconnect." ♦ July 22 at 2 and July 23 at 7:45: "Brought to Light." ♦ July 22 at 4:15: "All Too Human." ♦ July 22 at 7: "George Kuchar: Large and in Charge!" ♦ July 23 at 2: "Secrets of the Shadow World" (1989-99, George Kuchar). ♦ July 24 at 8:45: Critic Armond White examines music videos. ♦ July 25 at 7: "Space Exploration."

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THE NEW YORKER

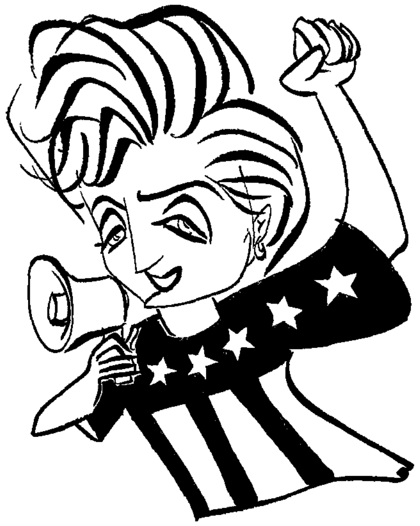
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
HUFFINGTON PUFFING

Thirty-two years ago this month, when Al Gore had just finished his junior year at Harvard, George W. Bush was freshly graduated from Yale, and the country was rent by war, assassination, rioting, and cultural upheaval, the Yippies were firming up their convention plans. Their idea was to stage a "Festival of Life" (to contrast with the Democrats' "Convention of Death"), complete with the mock nomination of a pig for President, celebrations of "the politics of ecstasy," and exhortations to "Rise up and abandon the creeping meatball!"—all designed to culminate, as Abbie Hoffman put it hopefully, in "a huge orgasm of destruction atop a giant media altar." In the event, the Festival of Life delivered plenty of destruction (with the indispensable help of the Chicago police) but very little ecstasy, and it was followed by an unusually severe and long-lasting case of postcoital tristesse.

Times change. As in 1968, the Democrats are about to nominate a lame-duck incumbent's handpicked Vice-President to succeed him, and the mayor of Chicago is still a man named Richard Daley. But political conventions are no longer troubled by the problem of being excessively interesting. Last week, the Republicans, who will descend on Philadelphia at the end of this month, announced their convention "themes." Are you ready? Day One: "Opportunity with a purpose: Leave no child behind." Day Two: "Strength and security with a purpose: Safe in our homes and in the world." Day Three: "Prosperity with a purpose: Keeping America prosperous and protecting retirement security." Day Four: "President with"—yes—"a purpose: A strong leader who can unite our country and get things done." The Democrats, who will convene in Los Angeles two weeks later, will be hard put to come up with anything as boldly stupefying as the argument that the purpose of prosperity is to keep people prosperous. But few doubt that the party that gave us the bridge to the twenty-first century will be equal to the challenge.

The question that naturally comes to mind is, Where are the Yippies now that we really need them? Last week, the answer presented itself in the unlikely person of Arianna Huffington. She was in town to promote her latest project, the Shadow Conventions, which will run concurrently with the "real" conventions and will have their own themes. Huffington is as colorful as Abbie Hoffman—as colorful, arguably, as the whole Chicago Seven put together. She was born and reared in Greece. She attended Cambridge University, where she was president of the Cambridge Union. She wrote controversial books—about feminism, Callas, and Picasso. She became a fixture of New York café society. She dabbled in cultish religion. She married a rich, indolent Republican, remade herself into the Perle Mesta of Gingrich-era conservatism, and pushed her husband into spending thirty million of his own dollars on an unsuccessful bid for the Senate in California. After he lost, she divorced him. She became a TV star, notably of "Strange Bedfellows," in which she and Al Franken, dressed respectively in nightie and pajamas, argued about the issues of the day while lounging in a double bed. She ditched her conservatism. She tried to get Warren Beatty to run for President. Her latest book is entitled "How to Overthrow the Government." She is quite a piece of work.



Arianna Huffington

At a press conference, Huffington was flanked by some fairly substantive characters, including Scott Harshbarger, the president of Common Cause; Chuck Collins, a prolific writer on income and

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

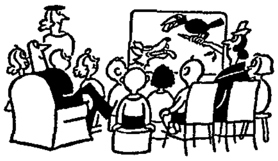
wealth inequality; and Ethan Nadelmann, the director of the Lindesmith Center, a drug-policy think tank. They proved nearly as adept as their hostess at sound-bite pithiness. The top one per cent of households own more wealth than the bottom ninety-four per cent (Collins). America has more people in jail just for nonviolent drug offenses than Europe has for everything (Nadelmann). And these outrages don't get discussed because big campaign donors don't want them discussed (Harshbarger).

But they are only the tip of Huffington's iceberg. At the Philadelphia Shadow Convention, John McCain will give the speech on campaign-finance reform they won't let him give down the street. Gary Johnson, the Republican governor of New Mexico, will discuss the drawbacks of drug prohibitionism. Jack Kemp will talk about poverty. Also on hand, as a living link to the glorious past, will be Paul Krassner, one of the half-dozen original Yippies. (He coined the word, actually.)

In contrast to '68, all this will be done in a basically friendly spirit. For various reasons (the influence of big money is not the only one), Bush and Gore see nothing to be gained from taking on Huffington's issues. But their silence is her opportunity, and she proposes to take it. As she knows better than anyone, there's more than one way to worship at the giant media altar.

—*Hendrik Hertzberg*

WELCOME WAGON
BALLOON DIPLOMACY FOR ELIÁN



The Cuban psychologists and teachers who have been drafted to help Elián González readjust to life back home have doubtless discussed with him the traumatic experience of being corralled by masked men and carted off in the middle of the night with nothing but the pajamas on his back, not to mention the experience of seeing Diane Sawyer stand on her head. But one wonders what they will make of Elián's account of a less well-publicized event that took place during his American sojourn: his visit, one Saturday in June, to the home of a Washington, D.C., couple named Judy and Gary Kopff. On the strength of an E-mail account of the event which the Kopffs sent to the members of an on-line neighborhood group, the outing was just the kind of thing that, were you a hard-line Communist ideologue looking for evidence of the decadence—or the plumb insanity—of the United States, would keep you busy for weeks.

In the mass E-mail, Judy Kopff explained how she and her husband, who is a financial strategist, volunteered to throw a party for Elián and his friends, because they thought he would enjoy their large collection of life-size toy animals. "Jasper the Kangaroo is about six feet tall and stands in what we call Evie's Ballet Room (where we pretend that our cat Everest practices her ballet lessons!)," Kopff writes. "In the third corner of the dining room is our collection of furry lowland and mountain gorillas." The children also met George, a brass monkey who hangs from a trapeze in the front hall; Archie, a seven-foot wooden ostrich who wears sneakers; Jock, an eight-foot papier-mâché giraffe; Susie, a three-foot cow with a hand-crocheted udder; and dozens of other inanimate livestock.

Elián and friends

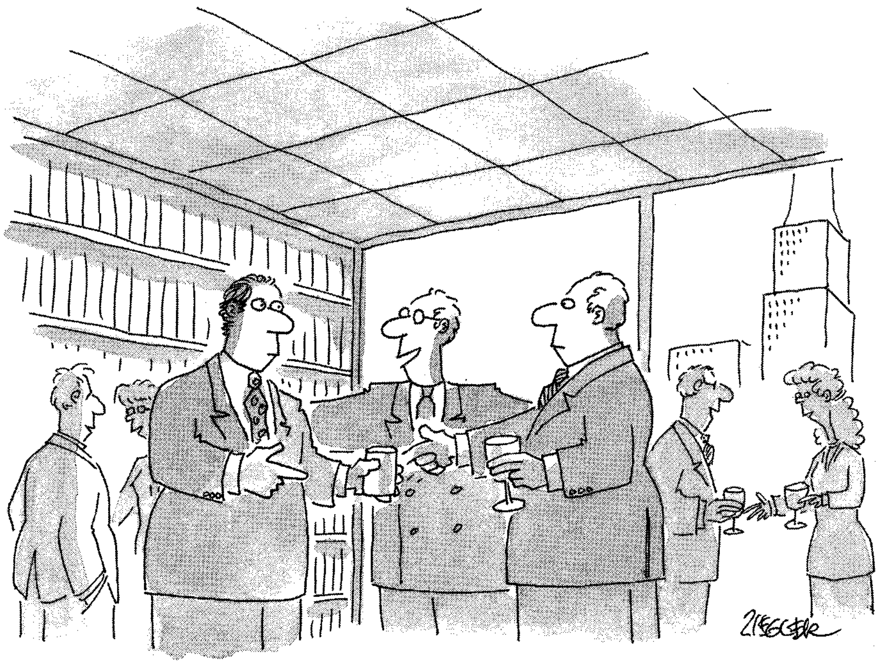
Most of the seventy-odd guests were Cubans, among them four of Elián's schoolmates from back home and Cuba's equivalent of an ambassador. Among the guests was Ruthanne Miller, the chair of the local Advisory Neighborhood Commission, who had suggested to a Cuban contact that a party at the Kopff house might amuse Elián and company. "Part of this might have been overwhelming to them," Miller said last week. "A lot of the houses they saw in Washington were very, very, very nice—a big contrast to their lives at home." Such concerns, however, don't seem to have deterred Elián and his young friends: they lined up to have their photographs taken as they sat on Dolly, the six-foot rocking llama in the Kopffs' living room, and joined in when Judy gave the children a lesson in making balloon animals. "Although they had a difficult time learning how to make a balloon in the shape of a dachshund dog, they easily understood how to make balloon hats and showed a lot of creativity in fashioning their individual versions," she writes in her E-mail.

There were other amusements of an order not to be found in Cárdenas. "The children went to Gary's second-floor office to watch (on our large plasma monitor) four DVD Walt Disney movies in Spanish (i.e., 'Lion King II,' 'Lady and the Tramp,' 'Jungle Book,' and 'Mulan'). Watching them sing the words to the songs in the 'Lion King II' movie was heartwarming," Kopff writes. It seems that the Cuban children were also capable of being just as intractable as their spoiled, materialistic American counterparts: "The kids would not leave our house until they had finished watching all four videos."

The visitors weren't just couch potatoes, though. "The children also played in our gym located in our British-style conservatory in our back yard," Kopff writes. "We had disconnected the treadmill, elliptical trainer, StairMaster, and other electrical exercise equipment. Gary supervised them in the gym and told them about his climbs up Mt. Everest, Vinson Massif in the Antarctic, Mt. Kilimanjaro in Africa, and Mt. Elbrus in Russia." Each child left with an assortment of party favors, including an eraser in the shape of a cat, a yo-yo in the shape of a hamburger, a medal with the word "Winner" written on it, and a balloon pump so that he or she could practice making dachshunds back at home. Elián also received "a large battery-operated clock with baseballs instead of numbers on its face" and a backpack in which to carry his loot home.

Kopff concludes her account by writing, "Gary and I did not make any judgments about whether sending Elián home to Cuba is a good idea or a bad one. We just wanted to extend some humanitarian warmth to children from another country. We believe that we did the right thing." And although you might think that the guest of honor would have had enough of zoos after months with the press camped outside the home of his Miami relatives, he was, apparently, "extremely well behaved and patient, considering how many of the Cuban people were asking to have their photos taken with him. We think that he was reluctant to grin, however, because his two front teeth recently fell out!"

—*Rebecca Mead*



"The editor who turned down the first Harry Potter book, say hello to the publisher who took a pass on Stephen King."

• •

DEPT. OF REAL ESTATE
GEORGE W. BUSH BUILDS HIS DREAM HOUSE

On the same day that Bob Herbert, on the Op-Ed page of the *Times*, called George W. Bush's relationship to the environment "Kevorkian," a group of New York architects heard some surprising news over at the Donnell Library Center, on Fifty-third Street. There, at a lecture sponsored by the Architectural League of New York in accordance with the theme "Shades of Green," an Austin architect named David Heymann discussed his plans for a weekend house he has designed for George W. and Laura Bush near Crawford, Texas. The surprise is that Bush, the supposed scourge of the environment, is building what architects call a very "green" house.

"Green" architecture has little in common with the Texas traditions of solid-gold doorknobs and studio-apartment-size bathrooms. Until recently, American architects have generally considered it a thanks-but-no-thanks option—a worthy thing to do, but too much money and too much work. Still, for architects who are concerned about the environment, the challenge is finding clients with the right sort of bank account and disposition, and then convincing them that recycling toilet water—as the Bushes will do—is a viable life-style choice.

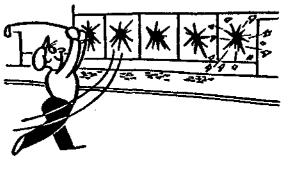
The Bushes, whose main residence is in Austin, bought the property last summer. It covers sixteen hundred acres of rolling farmland (enough to contain two Central Parks) nine miles from Crawford, which is roughly twenty miles west of Waco. Unlike the Hill Country around Austin, Crawford is not a fashionable place for a weekend home, but, according to Heymann, remoteness suits the Bushes fine. "There's just you and a huge distance," he said after the lecture at the library. "There's nothing stopping the space at all." The house itself is set on a slight rise, facing south. It is one story tall, a U-shaped series of rooms under a peaked roof, with a porch skirting the entire building. "It is a house without any pretension," Heymann said. "The Governor's vision of it is that 'people are just going to come over and sit on the couch and eat beans on a paper plate with us.' "

The house has a groundwater cooling system that doesn't need Freon to chill the air. And it is equipped with the technology to recycle what's known in the building trade as black and gray household water (black water is from the kitchen sink and the toilets, gray is from the bathroom sinks and the showers), so that the water can be reused for irrigation or, in the most sophisticated and expensive systems, for drinking.

The Bushes won't be drinking their recycled water. After all, if things go their way in November, they won't be around enough to justify the expense.

—*Andrew Blum*

DEPT. OF CONTRABAND
THE MYSTIQUE OF A BANNED GOLF CLUB



Compared with the normal rabble of weekend sportsmen, golfers tend to be a courteous, if diffident, bunch. So it was no surprise, the other day, when one particular golfer, a Park Avenue investment banker and gentlemanly member of several exclusive country clubs, diffidently (but courteously) declined to link his name to the newest-fangled innovation to hit his sport. The latest craze is a golf club called the Callaway ERC Forged Titanium Driver, and, according to our golfer, whom we'll call Mr. X, it allows the average player to hit the ball many yards farther off the tee, with no effort at all. The club has been on the market in Japan and Europe since March, but it has been banned competitively by the United States Golf Association and until very recently was not available in the United States. Mr. X obtained his club in April through back channels, from Japan, via one of his golfing buddies, who also happens to be the C.E.O. of a major investment bank.

"Usually, he's about two hundred yards down the middle," Mr. X said, recalling his first glimpse of the ERC's power in the C.E.O.'s hands. "With this club he hit the ball two sixty. He hit it huge. He was giggling. It was like his whole life had changed." Mr. X occupies a gleaming corner office in a gleaming midtown building, and as he talked he unveiled the club, which has a sleek gray graphite shaft and a head made of polished titanium. He said he was astonished, as he walked home from his friend's office with the ERC tucked under his arm, when strangers stopped him on Park Avenue to ask about the club. "They'd say, 'Is that *the* club? Where'd you get it? I'll buy it from you.' " Mr. X paid roughly seven hundred dollars for his black-market ERC, but the driver has since become available in at least one store, the World of Golf, in Manhattan, for a cool eleven hundred and ninety-nine dollars.

Officials at the Callaway Golf Company say the secret to the ERC's success lies in the complex construction of the club's titanium face. "They can stretch these metals thinner than ever before," according to David Braham, the proprietor of the World of Golf. "It creates a kind of trampoline effect, which the U.S.G.A. says is illegal." Golfing officials in Europe and Asia have sided with Callaway, and one well-known Scottish golf pro, Colin Montgomerie, even used the club in a tournament in May before hitting several errant drives and putting it away. "The ball goes farther," Braham said, "but the longer you hit, in golf, the more accurate you have to be."

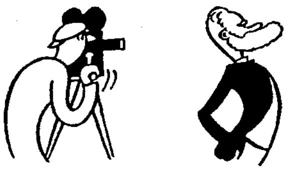
In the era of Tiger Woods, however, distance has become the sport's Holy Grail. "Golfers are always looking for an edge," said Mr. X, an expert golfer, who plays to a handicap of five. "The first time I used the club with my foursome, they complained, but I said, 'Go to Hell. I'm using it anyway.' By the second hole, they all wanted to hit with it." According to Braham, the average golfer will drive the ball ten per cent farther with the ERC, which for a decent golfer translates to well over twenty yards. According to Callaway, the ball comes off the club at a higher trajectory and with less spin, which causes it to roll. Braham has noticed that bad golfers are more readily seduced by the club than good ones. The ERC is selling especially briskly in Japan, where it's in competition with another tricked-up, hot-selling driver, called the Katana Sword.

Mr. X may yet experiment with the Katana Sword—it's hard to say. He's been missing too many fairways recently, and, after a brief, torrid love affair, he's thinking of giving the ERC a rest. "I'm thinking of getting the shaft changed," he said, wistfully swishing the club to and fro across the carpet in his office. "I was at a club the other day and somebody offered to buy it from me. I didn't sell it, which means I still think there's a chance. I'm still searching for Excalibur."

His investment-banking friend remains enthralled, however. "He couldn't stop calling me on the phone about it. It was that way for a couple of weeks, until he stopped swinging it so good. Then this week the club was stolen right out of his golf bag. Can you imagine? Stolen! I don't think it bothered him too much, though. He already had an extra one."

—*Adam Platt*

THE PICTURES
A CHRISTOPHER STREET LEGEND



Do you know Jason? Jason is the most fabulous cat in New York. He's black and gay and has quite a mouth on him—all that stentorian Negro speech mixed up with a lot of bitchy and hilarious show-biz queen talk. But mostly what's interesting about Jason Holliday—not his real name—is listening to him talk about Jason. He likes to get high on weed and vodka, sure, but what really gets him off is "the intoxication of his repeated 'I,' 'I,' 'I,' " as Brendan Gill wrote in these pages in his review of Shirley Clarke's 1967 documentary, "Portrait of Jason." The film is being shown this weekend at the Whitney Museum as part of "The Color of Ritual, the Color of Thought: Women Avant-Garde Filmmakers in America, 1930-2000," along with a number of other works from Clarke's fascinating œuvre.

Shirley Clarke, who died in 1997, at the age of seventy-seven, started out as a dancer in the nineteen-forties—Bennington College, black leotards, Martha Graham, and all that—and lived a life of inspired improvisation: Get married because you want to get out of the house. Persuade your husband to be a cameraman on your early films, because he's around. Help the visionary film scholar and documentarian Jonas Mekas start the Film-Makers' Cooperative, because it'll give you a place to show your work. Make a documentary about the vagaries of truthtelling with Jason—the guy who used to clean your house while he was high on poppers—as the star, because he is even more expert than you are at making life up as he goes along.

When discussing "Portrait of Jason"—and a number of her other films, including "The Connection" and "The Cool World"—Clarke told Lauren Rabinovitz, in her excellent 1983 interview for *Afterimage,* that her movies were "about alienation." She added, "As a woman in this world and a woman filmmaker, I know a lot about alienation." Like Clarke, Jason didn't think you should get into a "pathetic bag" about who you are, even if you're "a pretty frightening cat," which Jason knew he was. Wendy Clarke, the filmmaker's daughter, thinks her mother lost touch with Jason years ago, when she became ill with Alzheimer's. If Jason is still around, talking his Jason-talk, he might try taking a walk down Christopher Street one of these summer nights, and he's sure to see one or two of his progeny hanging in front of the Two Potato or the Dugout or what used to be Keller's, or maybe catching a breeze on the pier, lighting a joint and knotting his cravat and somehow getting on with it.

—*Hilton Als*

THE FINANCIAL PAGE

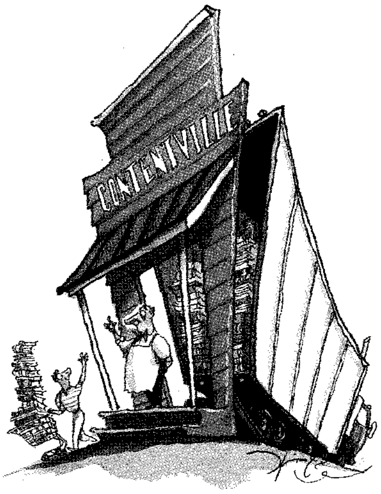
CAN CONTENTVILLE COMPETE?

In the glory days of E-commerce—I know it was a long time ago, but try to think back to 1999—the recipe for success looked easy. Concoct a business plan that described your business as the Amazon.com of lighting fixtures, take the company public at a billion-dollar valuation, spend all the money you raised in the I.P.O. on a high-profile ad campaign, and sit back and watch your wealth grow. But what most companies found is that the ad campaigns bombed, the billion-dollar valuations went up in smoke, and the customers disappeared as soon as they found a better price somewhere else. That's why those glory days came to an end. Pretty much the only would-be Amazon.com left standing is Amazon.com.

The conventional wisdom last year, then, was: *Build it and they will come.* And this year? *We're all going to die.* Into the slough of despond comes Steven Brill's new E-commerce venture Contentville. The site went on-line last week to almost eerie silence, with nothing like the huzzahs that had greeted the eToys and Pets.coms of the world. But attention must be paid, because if Contentville works it will be a model for how to launch a next-generation on-line business.

The site aims at being a cross between the world's greatest newsstand and your corner bookstore, and will eventually sell books, screenplays, magazine subscriptions, dissertations, journal articles, legal documents, speeches, and more. It has plenty of cool features—it offers opening chapters of certain new books, provides editorial recommendations from various literati, and sells most books more cheaply than Amazon does. Independent booksellers will post columns in which they tell you about the books they like and the ones they don't like. If you order a magazine subscription, the first issue will be shipped within forty-eight hours. But the really cool part is that Contentville, as a company, barely exists.

Contentville is what's called a virtual corporation. Ingram Book Group will handle the back end—picking, packing, and shipping—for books and magazines. EBSCO will provide the archive of downloadable articles from periodicals. Bell & Howell, which owns the rights to nearly every dissertation published in America since 1861, will get you that copy of Newt Gingrich's Ph.D. thesis, "Belgian Education Policy in the Congo, 1945-1960." Customer service is provided by a company called Ivus, situated in Oakland's inner city. The Web site itself is maintained by a team from IT Web Solutions. And Contentville will be able to draw on writers from *Brill's Content*, the print magazine: the two ventures have the same editor-in-chief, David Kuhn. "There are a lot of tentacles there," John Ingram, the chairman of Ingram Book Group, says, "and it ends up as a nice partnership of competencies."



And it *is* a partnership: almost all of Contentville's suppliers and distributors have invested in the company, and that gives them a stake in Contentville's success. Even the advertising strategy fits in: CBS owns thirty-five per cent of the company; NBC owns a slice, too. In return for the equity, they're providing Contentville with fifty million dollars' worth of advertising.

Now, the ideal of a virtual business — connecting demand and supply without mucking around with stuff yourself—actually precedes the Internet. Companies like Toyota, Coca-Cola, and Nike have thrived by placing themselves at the center of a network of suppliers; in the nineties, Dell used the same strategy to build computers and became the world's most efficient industrial company. What the Net offered was the chance to bring this model to the retail world. Where off-line retailers were slow-moving and weighed down with inventory, on-line retailers were going to be quicksilver and inventory-free. But most high-profile E-commerce companies didn't turn out to be all that virtual. Contentville is the real thing. "When I started this, I knew I didn't want a single square foot of warehouse space, and I didn't want to hear a damn thing about picking and packing," Brill says, sitting in his office overlooking Rockefeller Center, and gesturing with an unlit cigar. You can see the results. Amazon has more than seven thousand full-time employees. Contentville has fifty. Amazon has five million square feet of warehouse space. Contentville has none.

Of course, there's a downside to being virtual, and the bigger you are the bigger it is. When someone else does your distribution and delivery, you can't control what's in stock and what's not, and it's harder to maintain the quality of your service. "We made a bet that Ingram is going to be very good with customer service, and we feel terrific about that bet," Brill says. "But who knows? Will we be forever on the phone, beating someone over the head and saying, 'How could you do this to our customers?' That is a risk." Maybe not such a big one if you're shipping only a couple of hundred million dollars of goods a year, since you can keep a close watch on your suppliers and distributors. But it's out of the question when, like Amazon, you're doing three billion dollars of business a year and want to burnish a reputation for reliability. If you want to become the Wal-Mart of the Web, which is Amazon's ambition, there are certain things that you have to do yourself.

Still, a niche player like Contentville isn't trying to go head to head with Amazon. Brill figures that if his virtual enterprise can get ten per cent of on-line book sales, four per cent of magazine subscriptions, and a reasonable trade in archival materials, it will be in the black. "We just have to succeed on our own terms, which are relatively modest," Brill says. "It's insane to say that if you aren't the market-share leader then you don't have a real business." This may sound like heresy in the winner-take-most world of the New Economy. But the old saw still applies: "Get big, get niche, or get out."

—*James Surowiecki*

MICHAEL WITTE

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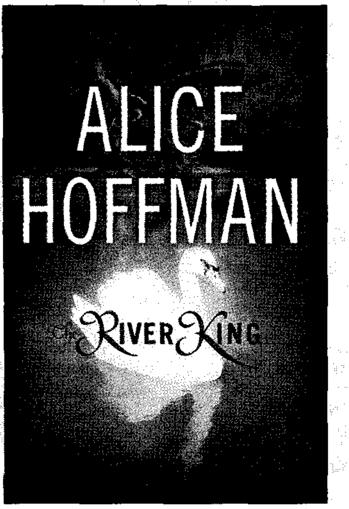

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LETTER FROM MEXICO

ENTER HARPO

How an upstart brought the ruling party down.

BY ALMA GUILLERMOPRIETO

One hardly knew what to stare at: the pointy boots the President-elect of Mexico, Vicente Fox Quesada, has not given up wearing; the anxious minions to President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León, adjusting the microphone so that the President-elect could address the nation from the official residence; or the Styrofoam panel placed just behind Fox, which had the words "Los Pinos" lettered on it, just in case anyone might find it impossible to believe that this scene was taking place—that the first member of the opposition to win a Presidential election in seventy-one years was actually standing in the very center of power, the Presidential residence of Los Pinos, giving a press conference, assuring reporters that his first meeting with Zedillo had gone swimmingly and that the process leading to an orderly transition of power next December from one party to another (the first in Mexico's history) was now under way.

Beyond Los Pinos's lovely wrought-iron gates, down in the noisy heart of Mexico City, the party that was once all-powerful, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI, was threatening mutiny against its leadership. In another part of town, militants of the leftist Partido de la Revolución Democrática, or PRD, were vowing to stand in opposition to the President-elect no matter how he might try to woo them and their leader, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, to his side. Even some of Vicente Fox's former rivals in his own party, the Partido Acción Nacional, or PAN, were barely suppressing their rage at this upstart who had dared to outrun them all. In other words, it was, if not the end of the political cynicism that Mexico's long and often dismal history has imposed on its citizens, at least the most cheerful hiatus anyone can remember.

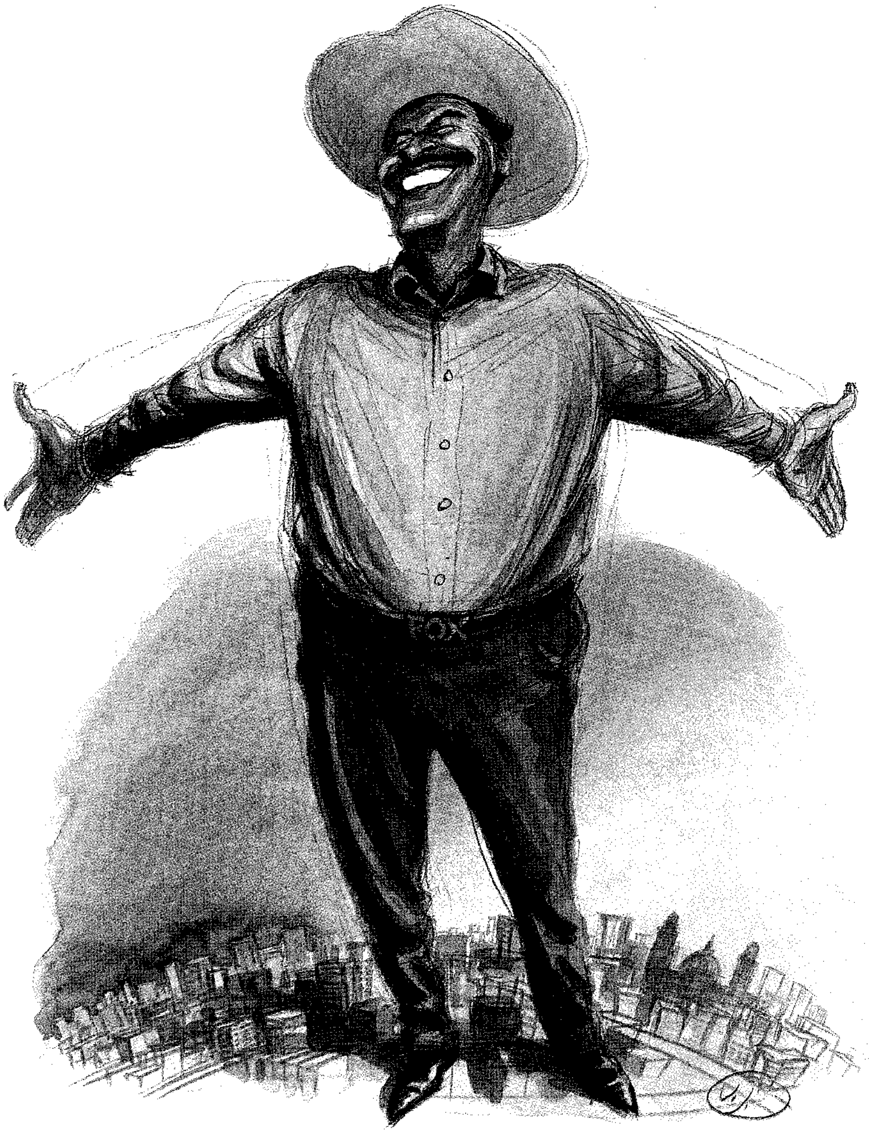
"Politicians are all crooks—in the end, everyone betrays." Mexicans would repeat these words to one another every six years, when the time came to elect a President, a congressman, or a mayor, and then they would either stay home on Election Day or, with due resignation, take themselves off to the polling station to cast yet another vote for the PRI—which was often enough the only party in the electoral contest. They reënacted this ritual in twelve consecutive Presidential elections, and twelve times the PRI renewed its grasp on power. Familiarity with the wily old party might have bred disgust, apathy, and corruption beyond compare, but the system offered its own rewards: stability; relative peace; an all-important sense of ritual; undeniable, if insufficient, progress; order; and, above all, no disappointments for a population that had disciplined itself always to expect the worst.

On July 2nd, that changed. Ten days after the final polls to be made public established that the winner of the election—by a very narrow margin—would be Francisco Labastida Ochoa, the candidate of the ruling party, the people casting the ballots drummed the PRI out of the Presidency, out of the majority position in Congress, out of any number of mayoralties, and, for good measure, out of the governorship of the state of Morelos. In Mexico City, a bastion of left-wing opposition to the regime, they even kicked the PRI out of the local legislature entirely.

Standing amid the rubble, all six feet six inches of him, was Vicente Fox, the unlikeliest, least *típico* President Mexicans could have chosen. His grandfather was an American immigrant of Irish background, his mother hails from the Basque Country in Spain, one of his favorite holidays is Thanksgiving, his four children are all adopted, he is divorced and, by his own confession, not disposed to womanizing, and his skin is rather pale. He was, before entering politics, the general manager of Coca-Cola in Mexico. And yet, in a country that is overwhelmingly poor, nationalist, distrustful of big business to the point of paranoia, much inclined to the rituals of machismo, and obsessively concerned with its Indian heritage and its revolutionary past, Fox comes across as a kind of latter-day Pedro Infante, the still mourned matinée idol of countless *nacionalista* musical comedies of the nineteen-forties: hearty, friendly, macho on the outside but with a cream-puff center, and, above all, a man of the people. By contrast with the gestureless politicians in cast-iron suits whom the PRI turns out, almost any other candidate would look lively, but Fox stands out much more. Other Mexican leaders let on that they have read Kundera and love Mozart. Fox states in his published autobiography-by-interview that in his youth—he is now fifty-eight—his favorite cultural activity was watching Olga Breeskin, a violinist known for her skill at playing Hungarian czardas while wearing a bikini. On Election Morning, while he was waiting for his daughter to vote, he took himself to the nearest *taquería* and wolfed down a couple of tamales and several tacos. Arriving at Los Pinos for his first photo op with President Zedillo, the President-elect sprawled in a formal armchair and showed off his boots, which have the words "Vicente Fox Quesada" embossed on them. "We'll see each other soon, King," he signed off to Juan Carlos I of Spain, after receiving the monarch's congratulations. Who could resist?

But how will he govern? Both the PRI and the leftist PRD, in their attempt to halt the Fox juggernaut, did their best to identify Vicente Fox with the sixty-year-old PAN. The PAN currently has governors in six of Mexico's thirty-one states—where they have ruled, it appears, with somewhat greater efficiency and less corruption than their PRI counterparts. As governor of the state of Guanajuato from 1995 until last year, Fox concentrated on upgrading education and promoting exports to the United States. Administratively, the outstanding characteristic of PAN governments appears to be don't-rock-the-boatism, but when its opponents vilify it, and warn of the hellish future in store for Mexico under Fox, they are referring to the attempts of local PAN governments to intervene in matters generally regarded as private or aesthetic. In Jalisco, the PAN governor has tried to enforce a conservative dress code for women in the bureaucracy; in Coahuila, theatre performances featuring nudity were banned.

The PAN has a complicated history: it was the first strictly political organization to defy the authoritarian regime born of the Mexican Revolution, and to defend religious—or, specifically, Catholic—freedom. (The descendants of the revolutionaries who drafted the 1917 Constitution forbade religious education, deported foreign-born priests, and denied others the right to wear cassocks, vote, or speak in public.) The PAN has often taken brave stands against the regime's ingrained corruption and not infrequent brutality—in 1968, for example, it was the only party in Congress to speak out against the massacre of hundreds of students during a peaceful protest demonstration. But the PAN has also been identified for many years with the more pro-business, intensely conservative crusaders in a certain sector of the middle class that prefers to think of itself as white, rather than mestizo, and with the more extremist tendencies in the Catholic Church, like the Opus Dei. Last September, when Vicente Fox waved about a standard with the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe, liberals shuddered. (The gesture didn't seem to affect Fox's popularity one way or the other: Mexicans are known for their devotion to the Virgin, but they are less partial to the Church and to churchy politicians.)



President-elect Vicente Fox looks like a macho, but with a cream-puff center.

VICTOR JUHASZ

Vicente Fox is probably as unlike his fellow PAN politicians as he is unlike his predecessors in Los Pinos. He is neither self-effacing nor an ideological scold, and, whereas other PAN candidates have given the impression that running hard for office strikes them as vulgar, Fox loves to win. He is nominally opposed to abortion, though he appears to hold no strong views on the issue. He is, however, extremely keen on micro-loan programs, which target women, primarily, for low-interest loans of amounts as small as fifty dollars, to start up a business (popsicle manufacturing, shoeshining), and which have been very successful in poor countries like Bolivia and Bangladesh, where the idea started. Fox seems to like women. He has no particular need to insist that he will strive for equal gender representation in his Cabinet, and yet he has. Mostly, Fox seems either unpredictable or infinitely pragmatic; he is capable of offering contradictory views on a given subject in the course of a single interview, and this quality is both his weakness and, one hopes, his strength.

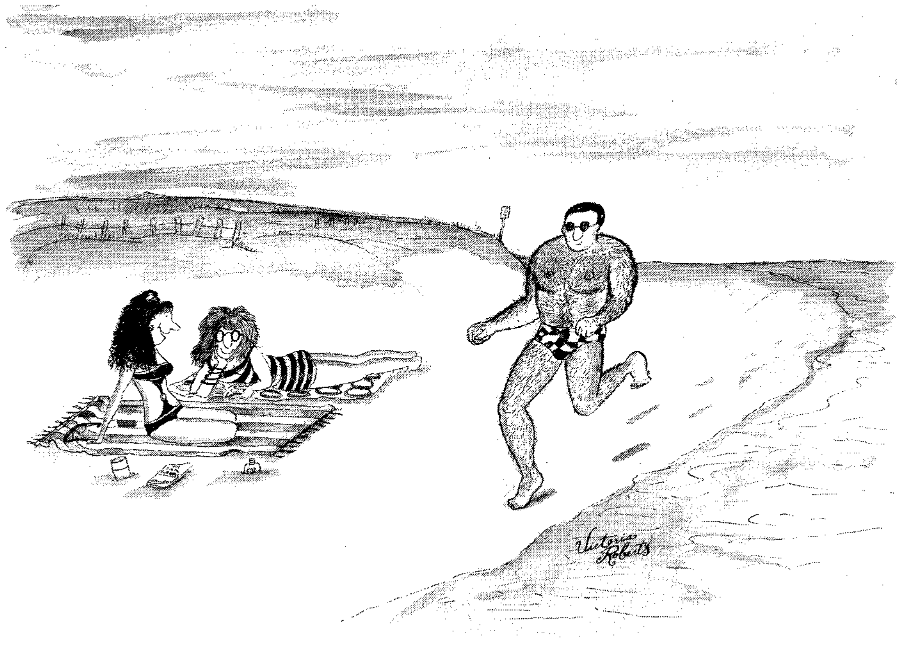
Three years ago, Fox, having decided that the PAN party structure would not necessarily name him its Presidential candidate, or have the energy to push him toward the finish line, started his own campaign organization and put it on the Internet; he called it the Amigos de Fox. He recruited two former members of the militant left, Jorge Castañeda and Adolfo Aguilar Zinzer, to be his political Henry Higginses, and to help him build a broad-based coalition with the left which would insure him a majority vote. (Castañeda and Aguilar Zinzer, intellectuals with many years of experience in political parties and in Congress, did rather well on the first count and failed spectacularly on the second.)

Fox also hired three prominent Mexican political consultants and Dick Morris, the former adviser to Bill Clinton. With their advice, Fox made a key decision: to start campaigning two years ago not only for the nomination but for the Presidency, running television ads about himself while the field was clear—"Before all the election clutter started," as Morris put it. It meant stepping ahead of all the other PAN party hopefuls, and raising serious money, but Fox never questioned the gamble.

The consultants' canniest decision, according to Morris, was to leave Fox's image alone. Nothing in Fox's speeches allows one to think that he has dazzling proposals to make about globalization, say, or the North American Free Trade Agreement, or Mexico's macroeconomic program or its agricultural development. But, by unleashing Fox's outlandish personality on the television screen, his advisers conveyed the idea that Fox was not only almost compulsively honest but also an original.

I asked Morris about what was generally considered Fox's worst moment in the campaign—one Tuesday in May when he refused, on live television, to accept Cárdenas's and Labastida's decision to hold a postponed debate among the three candidates the following Friday. "*Hoy!*" Fox insisted for about twenty minutes, while Labastida and Cárdenas tried to explain to him why "today" wasn't practical. "*Hoy!*" he repeated, stabbing the table with his finger for emphasis while his opponents smirked. To some of us, he came across as more than stubborn—slightly mad, and something of a fibber. (He claimed, inaccurately, to have a letter from the head of Mexico's largest television network guaranteeing him live coverage if the debate was held immediately.) The following day, Fox's campaign team was in despair, but Morris asked to see a copy of the tape. "I loved it," Morris told me. "I thought it was neat, this guy going '*Hoy! hoy! hoy!*' " Less than a week later, the campaign was running spots of Fox at meetings in which the candidate asked, "When is change going to come to Mexico?" and the crowd roared back "*Hoy!*"

The decision to take advantage of the "*Hoy!*" moment might have been his American adviser's, but Morris, a man not known for modesty, stressed to me that the campaign was not "run by consultants." It was run by Fox. "He was present at all our meetings, and he took the lead." Later, Morris put it another way: "It was sort of like writing a script where all you have to put in is 'Enter Harpo' and then 'Exit Harpo.' You couldn't script a guy like Fox to save your life. You just had to get out of the way and let Fox be Fox."



"And me without my bear spray!"

The answer to the question of whether Vicente Fox really belongs to the PAN came less than a week after the election. "In the end, the one who governs is Vicente Fox, not the PAN!" Fox told a Mexican daily. "The one who screws up or makes mistakes is Vicente Fox, not the PAN!" And then, displaying a fondness for American-style self-help literature, he finished up, "It's like that book 'Hold Them Close, Then Let Them Go.' [The Party] gives us values, principles, ideology. . . . Then it has to let us go."

What Vicente Fox represents remains a mystery. The bad Vicente Fox—who gets most of the attention—is, conceivably, the one that poor, frustrated, and humiliated Mexicans were happy to vote for: the ignoramus who makes faces at his opponents in the course of a simulscreen confrontation, the zealot, the Angry Man. He is also the waffler who sang the praises of bankers at a national bank convention, calling them *colegas,* and then, four days later, accused bankers of "serving themselves with the biggest spoon."

The bad news is that although the good Vicente Fox is reassuringly calmer, more tolerant, and more pragmatic than his evil twin, he is still not a very interesting political thinker. One can comb through his speeches and his autobiography, probe in interviews, and find little more than nostrums. "Real democracy is achieved through transparency, honesty, and government accountability," he says. And "Congress is obliged to exercise a severe and timely vigilance on the executive branch." The point is that because these principles are straightforward, old-fashioned, and democratic, and because they are stated simply, in the seven-step managerial language Fox acquired in his earlier career, in Mexico they sound fresh and wonderfully practical.

When I interviewed Fox a few days before the elections, I found him understandably tense, tired, and harassed but remarkably articulate and unguarded. And also punctual: as he keeps informing us, Fox is a manager, and he manages his time well, delegating tasks, making important decisions quickly, and sticking to a schedule. His adversaries accuse him always of an excessive fondness for the United States—the term used, by Cárdenas and others, is *vendepatria* ("fatherland-seller")—and it is true that in his career path, his can-do spirit, his love of inspirational literature, and that peculiar approach to public speaking which consists of making simple, forceful pantomime gestures, as if addressing the slow, Fox seems very American. But I found his views on relations with the United States similar to those of his opponents, and, if anything, more forthrightly expressed.

I asked him, given all his denunciations of Mexico's most recent rulers, including Carlos Salinas de Gortari, what he would change about the North American Free Trade Agreement, which Salinas negotiated, and he said that, in fact, he saw it as a good starting point. "But as an instrument it is too limited for the kind of neighbor relations we can build. . . . In the future, the central element has to involve narrowing the gap in income between Mexico and the countries to the north. Because for the United States the problem of continuous middle- and long-term growth has to do with migration; the United States needs immigrants in order to continue growing at its current rates. So if we face this problem jointly, in forty years I can see us enjoying a truly equal relationship."

I asked him how he thought the two countries could collaborate on the drug question, and he answered that, since no single country can solve the drug problem, what was needed were multinational agreements with precise and shared goals among all concerned countries, rather than the current system, in which the United States grants itself the role of certifying progress by others as a condition to aid. "The United States could, for example, meet certain goals in terms of detecting and detaining drugs at its borders," he said. "Because I can't understand how tons and tons get through every day and they can't find them. They could make a commitment to reducing consumption and the size of their market by a certain amount each year, and show results in terms of the detection and punishment of major drug distributors within their borders. Of course, the drug-producing countries would have to meet obligations as well: Mexico would have to reduce the amount of drugs produced or transshipped here, and all of this could be supervised and certified by a multinational group; we could invite the O.A.S., for example, for this task."

Repeatedly, his answers to an assortment of questions about national politics came back to the need for building coalitions, not only in order to win the elections but to govern effectively. "No single party in Mexico can govern, represent, or lead the entire country today," he said. "The PRI is already a minority in Congress. The PRD has an electoral ceiling of twenty per cent, as the left does in general all over the world. With that scenario, 'us' has to be a consensus, as it is in Chile, Italy, or Spain. We need alliances."

In the days since the election, Fox has embarked on a headhunter search for candidates. He has also presented a project to modernize the country's dysfunctional legal system, and proposed meetings with the other contenders for the Presidency. Neither Labastida nor Cárdenas has accepted thus far.

Fox's obsession with coalition building and agreements comes out of a keen awareness that the PAN, too, is a minority in Congress, and that he himself got only fifteen million votes—considerably less than half of the thirty-five million votes that were cast, and only two and a half million more than the PRI got. (Mexico has a total population of ninety-six million, of whom about two-thirds are of voting age.) In the good old days, the PRI could have made up the seven-per-cent difference easily, but this time around the PRIistas could not perform some of their best-known acts of prestidigitation: the *ratón loco*, or crazy mouse, in which a group of hired voters was sent to one polling station after another to cast ballots for the PRI; the *urna embarazada*, or pregnant urn, in which a ballot box lost its way on the road to the counting station and was found again, mysteriously fuller of PRI votes than when it started out; and the *voto comprometido*, in which even before voting day the Party was able to tally millions of votes that had been promised—sometimes in writing—by labor and peasant unions, small businesses, street venders, and the garbage pickers of every town.

Some of the credit, at least, for the new rules of the game must go to Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who became President in 1988, in elections that were probably the most fraudulent in Mexico's history, and who, once in power, undertook the constitutional and electoral reforms that allowed Vicente Fox to win. He granted the children of immigrants equal rights with second-generation Mexicans, which allowed Fox to run for President. He normalized relations with the Church, which helped remove the stigma from the PAN. And his Administration created something called the Instituto Federal Electoral, which by the time Ernesto Zedillo was elected, in 1994, produced reasonably unfraudulent results. The first task of the IFE, as it is known, was to eliminate the *ratón loco:* in the months before the 1994 elections, would-be voters were encouraged to register with their local IFE committee and obtain a credential with their photograph on it. On Election Day, card-carriers had their names checked against a computer printout of local voters before being allowed into a private, curtained polling booth. Afterward, they had their thumbs smeared with indelible ink. In Mexico, these simple measures were revolutionary. As President, Zedillo separated the IFE from the Ministry of the Interior, making it autonomous.

This year, the IFE spent almost a billion dollars not only to guarantee fair elections but to convince voters that they were so. The IFE also supervises the amount of campaign money each party receives (it is directly proportional to the number of votes won in the previous election), the amount of media coverage candidates get, and its tone.

The change in the country's electoral politics had actually begun long before the creation of the IFE, however. It was easy to forget in the glow of Election Day, for example, that whereas in 1988 the opposition had barely thirty-nine small mayoralties to its name, twelve years later half the population was governed at the local level—mayoralties and governorships—by the PAN and the PRD. Honor for much of this sea change was due to Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who in 1987 abandoned the PRI after he realized that he was not going to be its Presidential candidate. (His father, Lázaro, is revered as the PRI's principal creator.) Running against Salinas, and then again, in 1994, against Ernesto Zedillo, Cárdenas carried on a long, brave campaign against the PRI's corruption and its new neoliberal policies, and in favor of the nationalist, statist, *mexicanista* beliefs of the original PRI.

But there were many others. There was Luis Álvarez, a veteran leader of the PAN, who in 1986 went on a hunger strike that lasted forty-one days, after the PRI blithely stole his party's victory in the gubernatorial elections in Chihuahua. There was Dr. Salvador Nava, from the central state of San Luis Potosí, who, in 1991, already mortally ill, embarked on a long protest march toward Mexico City after President Salinas tried to impose a PRI governor on his state.

Perhaps no party or group fought as hard, though, and on so many levels, or paid as high a price, as the candidates and leaders of the once militant left. Sergio Aguayo, a youthful-looking, square-shouldered, dark-skinned congressional candidate of fifty-three, started fighting many years ago. He is a survivor of a nineteen-sixties street gang known and feared in the city of Guadalajara as *los Vikingos*, and one of the central acts of his campaign this year was to return to his neighborhood of San Andrés to meet with other survivors, whom he had not seen since he left, thirty-one years earlier. Aguayo had not known what kind of a reception to expect. In the group of paunchy, graying men, there was one with a thick gold chain around his wrist, several in suits, and one in a Zapatista T-shirt and a beret. Most were members of Cárdenas's PRD, some of the PRI. But in the sixties, when they were young and waging war on PRI-sponsored thugs who controlled the local high schools and, above all, the local university, they were all radicals. "Anyone who wanted to participate in student politics had to become a vassal of the Federación de Estudiantes de Guadalajara," Aguayo recalled before his fellow ex-*Vikingos*. "And our tragedy was that we refused to be vassals, or to ask permission." The sixties were a rebellious time anyway, and, in Aguayo's words, all over the country poor working-class kids like him who were expected always to say yes decided to start saying no. With his chums, Aguayo got into fights on a regular basis, before going home to feed the cows and chickens his mother kept on the outskirts of San Andrés.

In Aguayo's telling, this was a happy time: practicing the twist and the cha-cha-cha with the local girls at the corner hangout, studying, emerging victorious from phenomenal street wars, gradually acquiring blurry notions of politics and class struggle and facing down the PRI student thugs with increasing success. Then came the student rebellion of 1968, the student massacre in Mexico City, and the beginning of organized government repression against the *Vikingos*. One day, Chucho, the *Vikingo* Aguayo loved best, took him aside. "There's a rifle waiting for you," he said. It was Aguayo's first contact with the numerous guerrilla movements that had sprung up in the wake of the student massacre, and which had now established a foothold in San Andrés. "I don't remember if I hesitated two days or two months," he said now. "But I knew the weapon wasn't for me. I knew I wasn't a coward, but I wasn't convinced by the idea of guerrilla struggle." At the age of twenty-two, Aguayo left San Andrés for good.

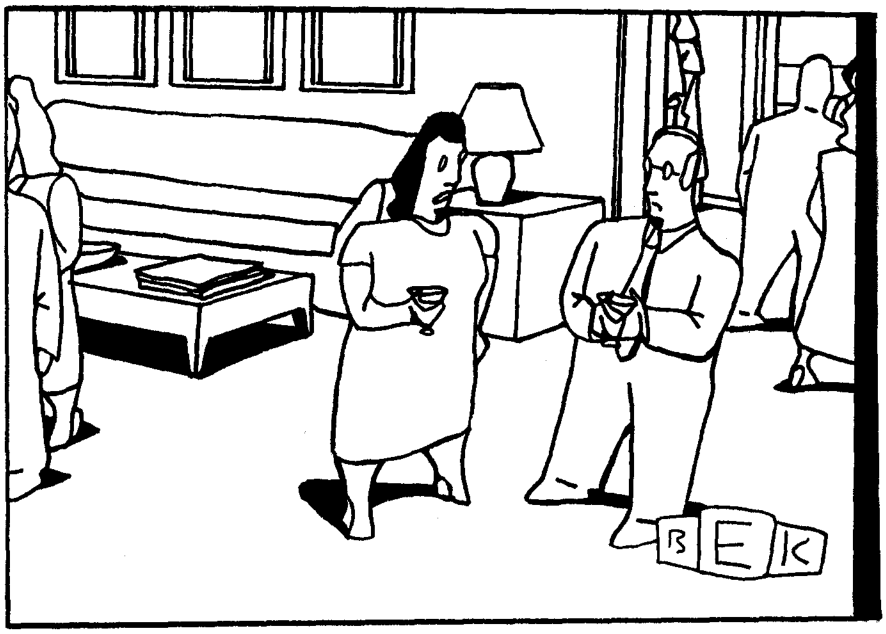
BARNEY
TAXI

Dozens of *Vikingos* who chose to join the guerrillas were killed in the years that followed, while Aguayo got a degree in international relations in Mexico City and tried not to think about his former friends. (He was, however, picked up at one point by the police and interrogated, as he says, "in the fashion of the day.") After his friend Chucho was arrested in the seventies and forced to sleep upright in his cell, because his interrogators had broken all his ribs and he could neither sit nor lie down, Aguayo became involved with the Mexico chapter of Amnesty International, and helped set up one of the country's first human-rights commissions. Like much of the left, he felt during that time that electoral politics was a corrupt and corrupting activity, and, like much of the left, he changed his mind when Cárdenas ran against Salinas de Gortari, in 1988. (Many believe that without the PRI's scandalous fraud, which included shutting down the computerized vote-tallying system for forty-eight hours, Cárdenas might have won.) Three years later, in preparation for the 1994 elections, Aguayo and a group of fellow-activists founded a citizens' volunteer organization, Alianza Cívica, to insure that Cárdenas, who was campaigning this time against Ernesto Zedillo, would get a fair vote.

Running for office himself seemed a logical next step to Aguayo: once the right of the opposition to obtain the Presidency had been guaranteed, it was time to stir up Congress with some citizen activism. If elected, Aguayo told his listeners, he would try to join the congressional human-rights oversight commission, which had languished in recent years, and give it some teeth. But on this July evening in San Andrés, as in every meeting I attended during Aguayo's shoestring campaign, his friends, collaborators, and admirers were not completely convinced. Politics, they said in so many words, is for politicians, and politicians are all crooks. Aguayo's leftist audiences were obsessed with purity, and still saw militancy—which seeks to vanquish adversaries—as far superior to politics, which seeks to compromise with them. "Just don't do anything with *la reacción!*" a former *Vikingo* shouted out in San Andrés. "Anything is better than their winning."

If the left is small in terms of numbers, it is influential in public opinion, and many of the most skilled and dedicated people now in academia, public office, or non-governmental organizations—people Fox would like to count on—are leftists. They can either provide greater scope, experience, and variety for Fox's Administration or hobble it. Now the left is in disarray, but its various warring factions agree on one thing: they will not help Fox rule.

The PRD's announcement of this decision provided a spot of cheer for PRIistas during the worst week in their history. They have been kicked out of power, mocked, called corrupt and decadent, and humiliated by their President, Ernesto Zedillo, who chose to go on national television to announce his party's defeat even before the IFE had given its definitive statement. They are out of work, many of them—at least for the next six years (or could it be forever?)—in debt, and scared. They are the descendants of a triumphant revolution—or, at least, of a triumphant faction of it—and their unswerving loyalty was always sustained by the vital link between the state and the Party, with the President as the kingly leader of both. In the days since the election, they have cast off the armature of silence which once guaranteed the PRI's "monolithic discipline," and have vented their rage at Zedillo. Others might rejoice in the President's decision to proclaim ahead of time the PRI's defeat to all the world, but PRIistas will not forgive him for having so gracelessly preëmpted Labastida's nationally televised concession speech in order to do it. In their newfound loquaciousness, PRIistas are denouncing all the recent Presidents—Miguel de la Madrid, Salinas de Gortari, Zedillo—and also their cohort of *perfumado* technocrats for their obsession with numbers crunching and the foreign debt.



"I was reading somewhere that people are stupid."

• •

When I heard these denunciations, I decided it was time to call on Manuel Garza, affectionately known to all as el Meme. I last talked to Meme Garza before the 1994 elections, when he was, against all conventional wisdom, predicting a landslide victory for his party's lacklustre candidate, Ernesto Zedillo. He had explained then the PRI's deep roots in traditional Mexican ways of organizing power and revering authority, and he had helped me understand in a new way the old system of *acarreados*—members of the poorest sectors of the population, like campesinos or garbage pickers, who were traditionally trucked in to voting centers on Election Day, or to public demonstrations of support for PRI hierarchs. They were, Garza argued, a means of making manifest local PRI leaders' organizing ability and strength. "Nowadays we get sneered at for having *acarreados*," he had exclaimed. "But we say, 'Let's see *you* truck them in!' "

It has been a long time since Garza has held any kind of government job (he tends to act as a consultant, and will take a seat in Congress for the second time this September), but he is a busy man. His secretary called twice to postpone our meeting—he was in an emergency session of the PRI's central committee, then he was called off to a meeting with Zedillo's closest adviser—and when we finally chatted, in his comfortable office, not far from PRI headquarters, vice-ministers and business leaders interrupted on the phone. I could see how anyone suffering from post-election doldrums might want to talk to el Meme, or just say hi. He is by temperament so bubbly and by long training so wise that anyone would leave his company feeling that victory for the PRI was not only possible again but imminent. Nevertheless, Garza was clearly struggling to overcome his anger and suffering. In the past, he had always reminded me of a sleek, well-fed beaver, but on this recent morning he looked ruffled, and definitely older.

The causes of his party's defeat were clear to him. "Politics was replaced by ad-mi-nis-tra-tion"—he rolled out the syllables contemptuously—"and administration is something technocrats know how to do. Dinosaurs"—he applied the mocking term others use for traditional PRIistas to himself—"do the spadework of politics. That is why we are thought despicable."

He turned to a folder full of charts with voting trends and statistics, and explained how he had outlined the campaign strategy to his party. "I said, 'First, we go after our own. Then we go after the ones who don't belong to anyone. And lastly we go for the ones who are going to vote against us.' And, instead"—he bounced back and forth to emphasize the magnitude of the *tecnócratas'* incompetence—"they decided that the thing to do was to go chasing after *civil society!*" By this, he presumably meant a useless bunch of electoral do-gooders.

When I asked el Meme about Zedillo's decision to preëmpt Labastida's concession speech, he looked tired for a moment. "I don't doubt Zedillo's honesty," he said. And then, for the first time since I've known him, he looked defeated. "At the age of sixty-seven, I'm going to have to struggle to learn how one uses liberty. I'm a politician who was brought up on discipline as the binding element for all the forces who coalesce around an ideal, or an objective . . . just like a soldier! Orders are obeyed. At the most, one had the right to ask for an explanation to an order one couldn't understand." He shook his head.

But Meme Garza would not be Meme Garza if he were capable of more than a few seconds' despondency, and soon he had picked up his didactic, optimistic narrative thread again, this time with a little parable. "I come from cyclone country—Tamaulipas, on the Gulf Coast," he told me. "And every so often a cyclone wipes us out, and the next morning the ranch hand comes rushing over to say, 'What do we do? We've lost everything!' And we say, 'Let the waters subside.' Then, when the land has dried out a little bit, we take a reconnoitre and see if the cattle have drowned, if the fences are down, if the ditches are silted up. If we suffered a lot of damage, we start fixing it. But maybe we didn't come out so badly! In that case, we go look up our neighbor and see if he needs a little help."

I felt I had learned enough from Manuel Garza to take his meaning: if the PRI was suffering, Cárdenas's PRD was much worse off. It had lost congressmen, city-council members, and also, as a result, significant federal-budget allocations. But perhaps it could now be persuaded to give up its enmity toward the PRI—the two parties have much more ideologically in common, after all, than either one does with the PAN or Vicente Fox. Perhaps the PRD could learn to wield its fifty-two votes in the lower house in concert with the PRI's two hundred and nine, preventing the PAN, which has just one less seat in the lower house than the PRI, from ever having a majority. Perhaps, together, they could make the PAN cry uncle.

There is something endearing about Vicente Fox's by now legendary stubbornness, even when it reaches nutty extremes. (*"Hoy!"*) He will need all the doggedness at his command to get through the four and a half months remaining until his Inauguration, and then even more for the following six years. It is hard to know which of this country's problems requires a more urgent solution—the impoverished, backward, and overextended educational system, the desertification of more than a third of the agricultural land, the violence and corruption generated by the United States' inexhaustible preference for illegal intoxicants, the lack of employment opportunities for a population that almost doubled in size in the last thirty years—but there are no easy fixes for any of them. The way things stand now, the new President of Mexico will not be able to rely on a loyal opposition to help approach these issues, and even in the most optimistic scenario he will not get much assistance from his party, either, simply because it is still too small for the country it has now been elected to govern. Nor does the citizenry have much reason to trust the odd mustachioed fellow they have just elected. He first came to their notice twelve years ago—the year the PRI shut down the voting system—when, as a congressman, he stepped to the podium, took a couple of paper voting ballots, tore holes in them, looped them over his ears, and strutted about protesting Salinas's victory. His learning curve since then has been phenomenal, but, even at his conciliatory, statesmanlike, post-electoral best, he remains very much an unknown, untested leader.

But at least there is one problem the country now doesn't have, and that is how to persuade a party that had remained in power for a few decades too many to take a break. When I called the human-rights activist Sergio Aguayo the night after the elections to find out how he'd fared in his congressional race, he greeted me enthusiastically. "Isn't it wonderful?" he asked, and, assuming he'd won, I answered that I was delighted to congratulate him on his victory. "What, me?" he said. "Oh, no, I lost. But the PRI lost, too, and that's just marvellous." ♦

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THE SECRET DIARIES OF ALAN GREENSPAN

BY ANDY BOROWITZ

Dear Diary,

Flip on CNBC: nonfarm payrolls are down, unemployment is up. AWESOME!!! There's nothing like goosing interest rates, and seeing the baaaaad results, to make me feel alive. I haven't lost the ole touch—not by a long shot, mama.

On a day like this, I'm so stoked I can almost stop worrying about tightening labor markets and increasing commodity prices. I feel . . . bodacious.

•

Dear Diary,

Watched "Wall Street Week." That butthead Louis Rukeyser was at it again—chortling about how investors ignored my cryptic "irrational exuberance" remark and sent the Nasdaq rocketing to record highs. Yo, Rukeyser, is this cryptic enough for you: *Kiss my ass!*

(Maybe "irrational exuberance" wasn't the right phrase after all—not spooky enough??? Consult thesaurus for alternatives.)

Note to me: renew car registration, pick up dozen eggs, raise federal discount rate.

•

Dear Diary,

Wife is on Imus again. The I-Man refers to her as "NBC's Andrea Mitchell." Not as "Mrs. Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan." In fact, my name doesn't come up once—not even a simple "How's Alan?"

The fact is, no one gives a good God damn about the real me—the kid who was always chosen last for the stickball team and was taunted with chants of "Ratface, ratface." The kid who saw the price of a Snickers bar double, and learned to hate inflation by the age of five.

Imus probably has a tech-heavy portfolio that would take a beating if a certain someone were to raise rates again. Heh heh.

•

Dear Diary,

Testify before Congress today. Alternatives to "irrational exuberance":

insane optimism
unhinged gusto
foolhardy glee
wacky jocundity
wiggy perkiness
loopy verve
meshuga Pollyanna-ishness.

•

Dear Diary,

So I go to the multiplex, just to get my mind off the strengthening dollar and foreign-trade imbalance. Trying to decide between seeing "M:i-2" and "Shaft," I flip a coin. Not just any coin—the lucky flipping coin that I use to make interest-rate decisions at the F.O.M.C. meetings. I drop the coin, and it rolls down a grate. Yikes!

I have never, ever made an interest-rate decision without Flippy the Coin. What do I do now???

•

Dear Diary,

Eeny, meeny, miney, mo,
Catch a tiger by his toe,
If he hollers let him go,
Eeny, meeny, miney, mo.

Tomorrow I'll be raising interest rates fifty basis points.

•

Dear Diary,

Wake up, pour myself some Apple Jacks, turn on the TV, and see the most bodacious sight in the world—Nasdaq down 500. All those pretty, pretty red arrows goin' nowhere but south.

Was it raising rates that did it, or my "meshuga Pollyanna-ishness" comment to the Senate Banking Committee last week? Who cares? Any way you slice it, it was me!

I've said it before, I'll say it again. Greenspan: you da man. ♦

BARRY BLITT

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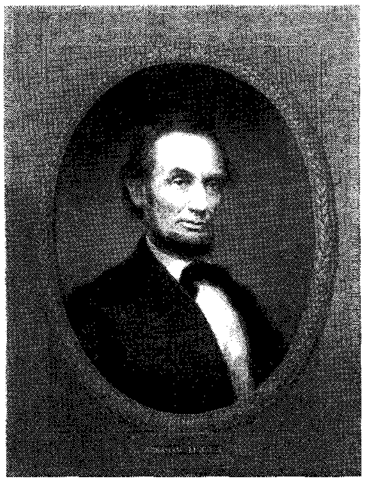

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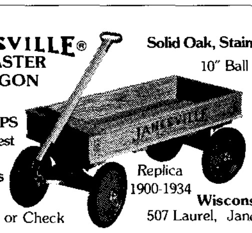

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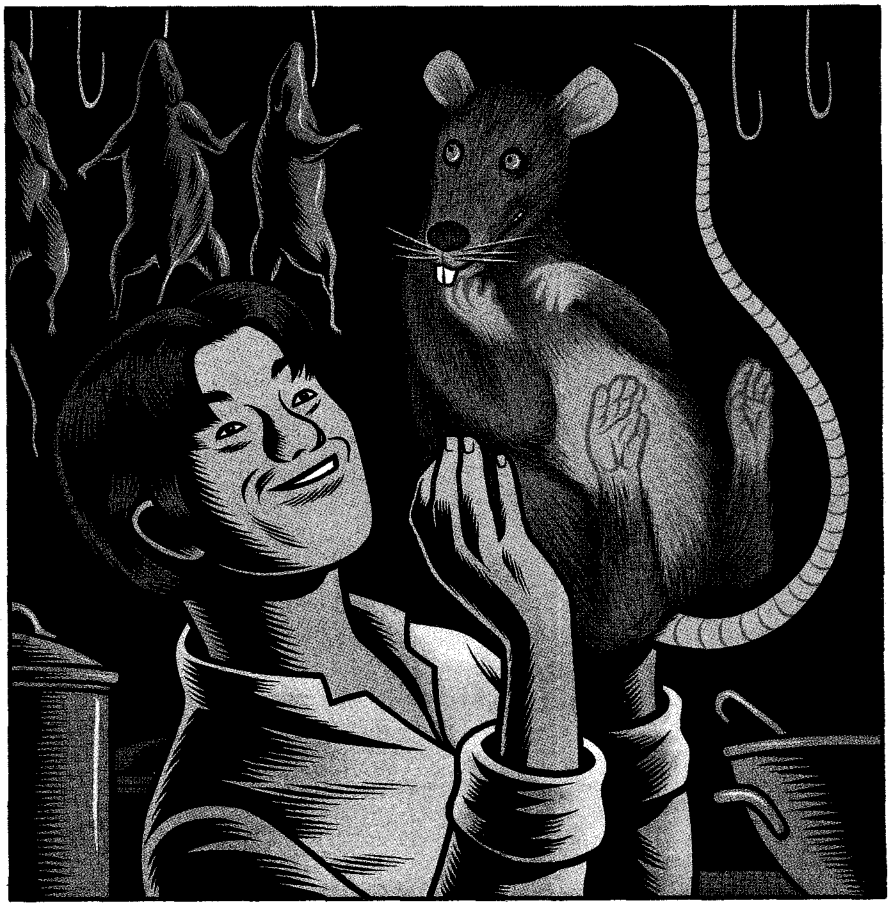
POSTCARD FROM CHINA

A RAT IN MY SOUP

Looking for the best-tasting rodent in town.

BY PETER HESSLER



"If you have white hair and eat rat regularly, it will turn black," the owner said.

CHARLES BURNS

"Do you want a big rat or a small rat?" the waitress asked.

I was getting used to making difficult decisions in Luogang, a small village in southern China's Guangdong Province. I'd come here on a whim, having heard that Luogang had a famous restaurant that specialized in the preparation of rats. Upon arrival, however, I discovered that there were two celebrated restaurants—the Highest Ranking Wild Flavor Restaurant and the New Eight Sceneries Wild Flavor Food City. They were next door to each other, and they had virtually identical bamboo-and-wood décors. Moreover, their owners were both named Zhong—but, then, everybody in Luogang seemed to be named Zhong. The two Zhongs were not related, and competition between them was keen. As a foreign journalist, I'd been cajoled to such an extent that, in an effort to please both Zhongs, I agreed to eat two lunches, one at each restaurant.

The waitress at the Highest Ranking Wild Flavor Restaurant, who was also named Zhong (in Chinese, it means "bell"), asked again, "Do you want a big rat or a small rat?"

"What's the difference?" I said.

"The big rats eat grass stems, and the small ones eat fruit."

I tried a more direct tack. "Which tastes better?"

"Both of them taste good."

"Which do you recommend?"

"Either one."

I glanced at the table next to mine.

Two parents, a grandmother, and a little boy were having lunch. The boy was gnawing on a rat drumstick. I couldn't tell if the drumstick had belonged to a big rat or a small rat. The boy ate quickly. It was a warm afternoon. The sun was shining. I made my decision. "Small rat," I said.

The Chinese say that people in Guangdong will eat anything. Besides rat, a customer at the Highest Ranking Wild Flavor Restaurant can order turtledove, fox, cat, python, and an assortment of strange-looking local animals whose names do not translate into English. All of them are kept live in pens at the back of the restaurant and are killed only when a customer orders one of them. Choosing among them involves considerations beyond flavor or texture. You order cat not just because you enjoy the taste of cat but because cats are said to impart a lively *jingshen* (spirit). You eat deer penis to improve virility. Snakes make you stronger. And rat? "It keeps you from going bald," Zhong Shaocong, the daughter of the owner of the Highest Ranking Wild Flavor Restaurant, told me. Zhong Qingjiang, the owner of the New Eight Sceneries Wild Flavor Food City, went further. "If you have white hair and eat rat regularly, it will turn black," she said. "And if you're going bald and you eat rat every day your hair will stop falling out. A lot of the parents around here feed rat to a small child who doesn't have much hair, and the hair grows better."

Earlier this year, Luogang opened a "restaurant street" in the newly developed Luogang Economic Open Zone, a parkland and restaurant district designed to draw visitors from nearby Guangzhou City. The government invested a million two hundred thousand dollars in the project, which enabled the two rat restaurants to move from their old, cramped quarters in a local park into new, greatly expanded spaces—about eighteen hundred square feet for each establishment. The Highest Ranking Wild Flavor Restaurant, which cost forty-two thousand dollars to build, opened in early March. Six days later, the New Eight Sceneries Wild Flavor Food City opened, on an investment of fifty-four thousand dollars. A third restaurant—a massive, air-conditioned facility, which is expected to cost seventy-two thousand dollars—will open soon. A fourth is in the planning stages.

On the morning of my initiation into rat cuisine, I visited the construction site of the third facility, whose owner, Deng Ximing, was the only local restaurateur not named Zhong. He was married to a Zhong, however, and he had the fast-talking confidence of a successful entrepreneur. I also noticed that he had a good head of hair. He spoke of the village's culinary tradition with pride. "It's more than a thousand years old," he said. "And it's always been rats from the mountains—we're not eating city rats. The mountain rats are clean, because up there they aren't eating anything dirty. Mostly, they eat fruit—oranges, plums, jackfruit. People from the government hygiene department have been here to examine the rats. They took them to the laboratory and checked them out thoroughly to see if they had any diseases, and they found nothing. Not even the slightest problem."

Luogang's restaurant street has been a resounding success. Newspapers and television stations have reported extensively on the benefits of the local specialty, and an increasing number of customers are making the half-hour trip from Guangzhou City. Both the Highest Ranking Wild Flavor Restaurant and the New Eight Sceneries Wild Flavor Food City serve, on average, three thousand rats every Saturday and Sunday, which are the peak dining days. "Many people come from faraway places," Zhong Qingjiang told me. "They come from Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hong Kong, Macao. One customer came all the way from America with her son. They were visiting relatives in Luogang, and the family brought them here to eat. She said you couldn't find this kind of food in America."

In America, needless to say, you would be hard-pressed to find twelve thousand fruit-fed rats anywhere on any weekend, but this isn't a problem in Luogang. On my first morning in the village, I watched dozens of peasants come down from the hills, looking to get a piece of the rat business. They came on mopeds, on bicycles, and on foot. All of them carried burlap sacks of squirming rats that had been trapped on their farms.

"Last year, I sold my oranges for fifteen cents a pound," a farmer named Zhong Senji told me. "But this year the price has dropped to less than ten cents." Like many other peasants, Zhong decided that he could do a lot better with rats. Today,

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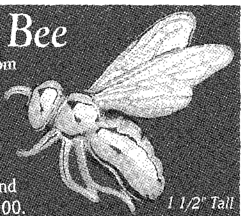

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he had nine rats in his sack. When the sack was put on a scale in the rear of the Highest Ranking Wild Flavor Restaurant, it shook and squeaked. It weighed in at just under three pounds, and Zhong received the equivalent in yuan of a dollar forty-five per pound, for a total of three dollars and eighty-seven cents. In Luogang, rats are more expensive than pork or chicken. A pound of rat costs nearly twice as much as a pound of beef.

At the Highest Ranking Wild Flavor Restaurant, I began with a dish called Simmered Mountain Rat with Black Beans. There were plenty of other options on the menu—among them, Mountain Rat Soup, Steamed Mountain Rat, Simmered Mountain Rat, Roasted Mountain Rat, Mountain Rat Curry, and Spicy and Salty Mountain Rat—but the waitress had enthusiastically recommended the Simmered Mountain Rat with Black Beans, which arrived in a clay pot.

I ate the beans first. They tasted fine. I poked at the rat meat. It was clearly well done, and it was attractively garnished with onions, leeks, and ginger. Nestled in a light sauce were skinny rat thighs, short strips of rat flank, and delicate, toylike rat ribs. I started with a thigh, put a chunk of it into my mouth, and reached for a glass of beer. The beer helped.

The restaurant's owner, Zhong Dieqin, came over and sat down. "What do you think?" she asked.

"I think it tastes good."

"You know it's good for your health."

"I've heard that."

"It's good for your hair and skin," she said. "It's also good for your kidneys."

Earlier that morning, I'd met a peasant who told me that my brown hair might turn black if I ate enough rat. Then he thought for a moment and said that he wasn't certain if eating rat had the same effect on foreigners that it did on the Chinese—it might do something entirely different to me. The possibility seemed to interest him a great deal.

Zhong Dieqin watched me intently. "Are you sure you like it?" she asked.

"Yes," I said, tentatively. In fact, it wasn't bad. The meat was lean and white, without a hint of gaminess. Gradually, my squeamishness faded, and I tried to decide what, exactly, the flavor of rat reminded me of. But nothing came to mind. It simply tasted like rat.

After a while, Zhong Dieqin excused herself, and the waitress drifted away. A young man came over and identified himself as the restaurant's assistant manager. He wanted to know whether I had come to Luogang specifically to report on the restaurants. I said that I had. "Did you register with the government before you came here?" he asked.

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because it's too much trouble."

"You should have done that—those are the rules," he said. There was a wariness in his voice, which I recognized as part of a syndrome that is pervasive throughout China: Fear of a Foreign Writer.

"I don't think the government cares very much if I write about restaurants," I said.

"They could help you," he said. "They would give you statistics and arrange interviews."

"I can find my own interviews. And if I registered with the government I would have to take all of the government officials out to lunch." A scene appeared in my mind: a gaggle of Communist cadres, middle-aged men in cheap suits, all of them eating rat. I put my chopsticks down.

The assistant manager kept talking. "A lot of foreigners come to our China to write about human rights," he said.

"That's true."

He looked at me hard. "Have you come here to write about human rights?"

"Have I asked you any questions about human rights?"

"No."

"Well, then, it would be hard for me to write a story about human rights. I'm writing a story about Luogang's rat restaurants. It's nothing sensitive."

"You should have registered with the government," he said stubbornly.

Next door, at the New Eight Sceneries Wild Flavor Food City, the Zhongs were more media-savvy. They asked if I had brought along a television crew. They looked disappointed when I said that I hadn't. Then the floor manager brightened and asked me how I'd liked their competition.

"It was fine," I said.

"What did you eat?"

"Simmered Mountain Rat with Black Beans."

"You'll like ours better," she said. "Our cook is better, the service is quicker, and the waitresses are more polite."

I decided to order the Spicy and Salty Mountain Rat. This time, when the waitress asked about my preference in sizes, I

SELF

Found not founded. Attacking only
from the back
like the Bengal tiger; afraid

of the face. Sweet-talking like the addict
coveting
another addict's stash. Fished from

my own trash like the feared
letter I heard later
held a birthday check.

Watched like the tiger from
a great height,
hollered out. Two-faced, masked

like the villager tricking
the tiger. Tricked
like the tiger. Founded on owned ground.

—*Dan Chiasson*

said, pleased with my boldness, "Big rat."

"Come and choose it."

"What?"

"Pick out the rat you want."

I followed one of the kitchen workers to a shed behind the restaurant, where cages were stacked atop one another. Each cage contained more than thirty rats. The shed did not smell good. The worker pointed at a rat.

"How about this one?" he said.

"Um, sure."

He put on a glove, opened the cage, and picked up the chosen rat. It was about the size of a softball. "Is it O.K.?" he said.

"Yes."

"Are you certain?"

The rat gazed at me with beady eyes. I nodded.

Suddenly, the worker flipped his wrist, swung the rat into the air by the tail, and let go. The rat made a neat arc. There was a soft thud when its head struck the cement floor. There wasn't much blood. The worker grinned. "You can go back to the dining room now," he said. "We'll bring it out to you soon."

"O.K.," I said.

Less than fifteen minutes later, the dish was at my table, garnished with carrots and leeks. The chef came out of the kitchen to join the owner, Zhong Qingjiang, the floor manager, and a cousin of the owner to watch me eat. "How is it?" the chef asked.

"Good."

"Is it too tough?"

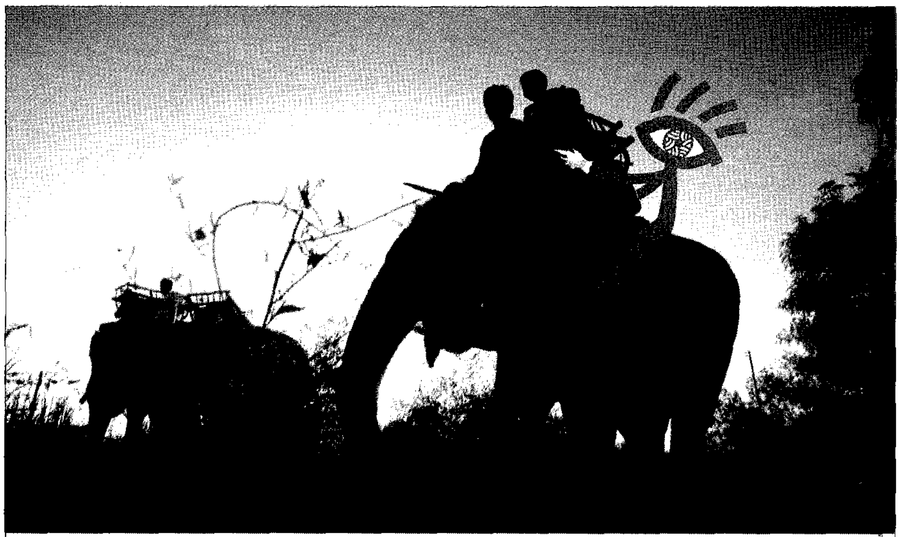
"No," I said. "It's fine."

In truth, I was trying hard not to taste anything. I had lost my appetite in the shed, and now I ate quickly, washing every bit down with beer. I did my best to put on a good show, gnawing on the bones as enthusiastically as possible. When I finished, I sat back and managed a smile. The chef and the others nodded with approval.

The owner's cousin said, "Next time you should try the Longfu Soup, because it contains tiger, dragon, and phoenix."

"What do you mean by 'tiger, dragon, and phoenix'?" I asked warily. I didn't want to make another trip to the shed.

"It's not real tigers, dragons, and phoenixes," he assured me. "They're represented by other animals—cat for the tiger, snake for the dragon, and chicken for the phoenix. When you mix them together, there are all kinds of health benefits. And they taste good, too." ♦



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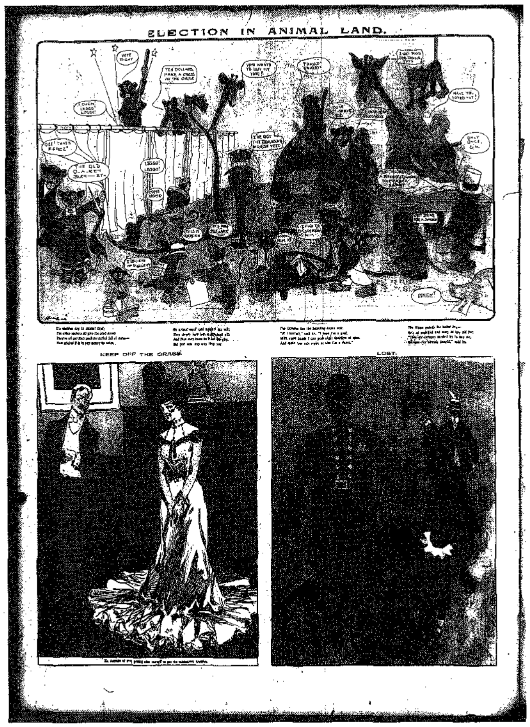
A REPORTER AT LARGE

DEADLINE

The author's desperate bid to save America's past.

BY NICHOLSON BAKER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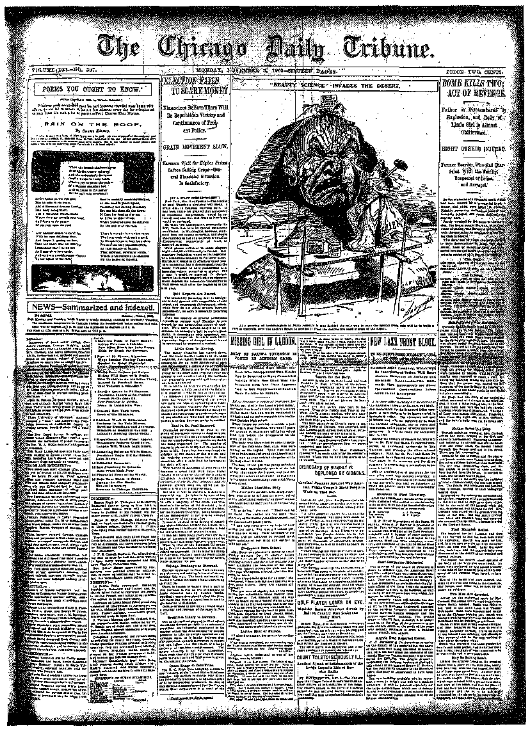

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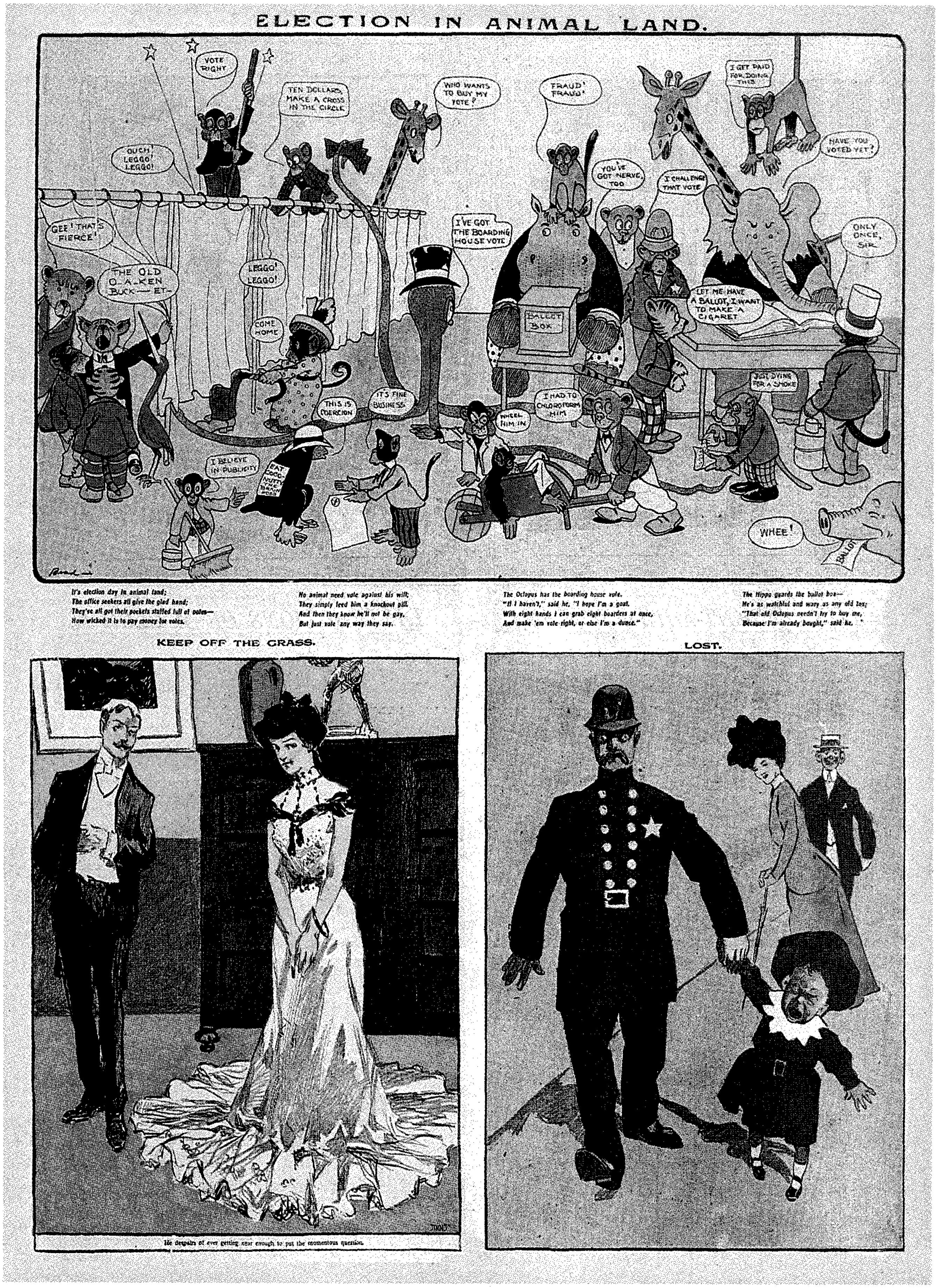
EIGHT OTHERS INJURED.

Former Boarder, Who Had Quarreled With the Family, Suspected of Crime, and Arrested.

A few years ago, while I was in the middle of a squabble over book-dumping with the San Francisco Public Library, a man named Blackbeard told a reporter that he wanted to talk to me. I called him up one evening. Bill Blackbeard had a formal, slightly breathless way of talking; he was obviously intelligent, perhaps a little Ancient Marinerian in the way that lifelong collectors can be. He had edited collections of comic strips (early "Popeye," "Terry and the Pirates," "Krazy Kat"), and he operated something called the San Francisco Academy of Comic Art—a one-man curatorship, apparently—which owned, he said, a large number of ex-library newspaper volumes, including one-of-a-kind runs of the great early Hearst papers.

Some of what Blackbeard told me I couldn't quite comprehend. He said that the Library of Congress, the nation's library of last resort, had replaced most of its enormous collection of late-nineteenth- and twentieth-century newspapers with microfilm, and he also said that research libraries were "telling fibs" when they justified the discarding of newspapers (and books) on the basis of diagnosed states of acidity and embrittlement. I said that it all sounded extremely interesting, and that maybe he should write about it himself. I thanked him and hung up. I was tired of finding fault with libraries; in theory, I loved libraries.

Almost two years later, I thought of Blackbeard again, and I decided to pay him a visit. He had by this time sold his newspaper collection to Ohio State University, and had moved to Santa Cruz, where his wife liked to surf. He was in his early seventies, fit, clean-shaven, wearing a nubbly gold sweater and a baseball cap turned backward. One room of his very small house was filled with dime novels and old science-fiction magazines in white boxes. In his youth, he'd written for *Weird Tales;* he'd driven armored vehicles in the 89th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron in the Second World War; and in 1967, filled with an ambition to write a history of the American comic strip, he'd discovered that libraries were getting rid of their newspaper collections. The San Francisco Public Library, Blackbeard said, had an "incredible treasure trove." Staff members told him that they would love to have him take it away, but unfortunately he was a private citizen—the library's charter permitted the transfer of material only to a nonprofit organization. "I became a nonprofit organization so fast you couldn't believe it," Blackbeard told me. Soon he had acquired a bound run of William Randolph Hearst's opulently lurid New York *American* which the Hearst Corporation had donated to the Los Angeles Public Library (the library kept the custom-made burnished mahogany shelves), and another *American* run, from the Stanford University libraries. He went around the country picking up newspaper volumes. Sometimes he cut the comic strips out and sold the remains to dealers; sometimes he kept



ELECTION IN ANIMAL LAND.

VOTE RIGHT
OUCH! LEGGO! LEGGO!
TEN DOLLARS. MAKE A CROSS IN THE CIRCLE
WHO WANTS TO BUY MY VOTE?
FRAUD! FRAUD!
I GET PAID FOR DOING THIS
HAVE YOU VOTED YET?
YOU'VE GOT NERVE, TOO
I CHALLENGE THAT VOTE
ONLY ONCE, SIR.
GEE! THAT'S FIERCE!
THE OLD O-A-KEN BUCK—ET-
LEGGO! LEGGO!
COME HOME
I'VE GOT THE BOARDING HOUSE VOTE
BALLOT BOX
LET ME HAVE A BALLOT, I WANT TO MAKE A CIGARET
JUST DYING FOR A SMOKE
THIS IS COERCION
IT'S FINE BUSINESS
I HAD TO CHLOROFORM HIM
WHEEL HIM IN
I BELIEVE IN PUBLICITY
WHEE!
BALLOT

It's election day in animal land;
The office seekers all give the glad hand;
They've all got their pockets stuffed full of votes—
How wicked it is to pay money for votes.

No animal need vote against his will;
They simply feed him a knockout pill.
And then they know he'll not be gay,
But just vote any way they say.

The Octopus has the boarding house vote.
"If I haven't," said he, "I hope I'm a goat.
With eight hands I can grab eight boarders at once,
And make 'em vote right, or else I'm a dunce."

The Hippo guards the ballot box—
He's as watchful and wary as any old fox;
"That old Octopus needn't try to buy me,
Because I'm already bought," said he.

KEEP OFF THE GRASS.

He despairs of ever getting near enough to put the momentous question.

LOST.

Opposite: a printout from microfilm of the November 2 and 3, 1902, Chicago Tribune. After the University of Chicago shot the film, it got rid of the originals. Above: a photograph of one of the pages, made from a volume the British Library disposed of.

the volumes whole. "When I suddenly discovered that I could have any of them I wanted, I just went off my rocker. It was the most wonderful thing in the world."

Not long after I visited Blackbeard, my family and I moved from California to southern Maine. I sat in my new office, surrounded by boxes of books, staring out the window at a valley filled with young trees. There were several off-white nests of webworms clinging like the ends of Q-Tips to some of the upper branches of the trees. I looked at the webworm nests, and I thought, Why not find out what's happened to the newspapers?

The British Library's newspaper collection occupies several buildings in Colindale, north of London, near a former Royal Air Force base that is now a museum of aviation. On October 20, 1940, a German airplane—possibly mistaking the library complex for an aircraft-manufacturing plant—dropped a bomb on it. Ten thousand volumes of Irish and English papers were destroyed; fifteen thousand more were damaged. Unscathed, however, was a superb inventory of foreign newspapers, including many American titles: thousands of fifteen-pound, brick-thick folios bound in marbled boards, their pages stamped in red with the British Museum's crown-and-lion symbol of curatorial responsibility.

One of the library's treasures was a seventy-year run, in about eight hundred volumes, of Joseph Pulitzer's exuberantly polychromatic newspaper, the New York *World.* Pulitzer had discovered that illustrations sold the news, and in the eighteen-nineties he began printing four-color Sunday supplements and splash-panel cartoons. The more maps, murder-scene diagrams, ultra-wide front-page political cartoons, fashion illustrations, needlepoint patterns, children's puzzles, and comics that Pulitzer published, the higher the *World's* sales climbed; by the mid-nineties, it had the largest circulation of any paper in the country. William Randolph Hearst moved to New York in 1895 and copied Pulitzer's innovations and poached his staff, and the war between the two men, in a sense, created modern privacy-probing, muckraking, glamour-smitten journalism. A million people a day once read Pulitzer's *World;* now an original set is a good deal rarer than a Shakespeare First Folio or the Gutenberg Bible.

Besides the *World,* the British Library possessed one of the last sweeping runs of the sumptuous Chicago *Tribune:* about thirteen hundred volumes, reaching from 1888 to 1958, complete with bonus four-color art supplements on heavy stock from the eighteen-nineties ("This Paper Is Not Complete Without the Color Illustration," says a box on the masthead); extravagant layouts of illustrated fiction; elaborately hand-lettered ornamental headlines; and decades of page-one political cartoons by John T. McCutcheon. The British Library owned, as well, a huge set of the San Francisco *Chronicle* (one of perhaps two that are left, the second owned by the Chronicle company itself and inaccessible to scholars), which in its heyday was filled with gorgeously drippy Art Nouveau graphics. And the library owned a monster accumulation of what one could argue is the best newspaper in United States history, the New York *Herald Tribune,* along with its two tributaries, Horace Greeley's anti-slavery *Tribune* and James Gordon Bennett's initially pro-slavery *Herald.* The *Herald Tribune* set carries all the way through to 1966, when the paper itself died—this set, too, may be the last surviving long run anywhere. And there was a goodly stretch of the New York *Times* on the British Library's shelves (1915 through 1958), with Al Hirschfeld drawings and hundreds of luminously fine-grained, sepia-tinted "Rotogravure Picture Sections" bound in place.

All these newspapers have been well cared for over the years: the volumes that I was allowed to examine this past fall were in lovely shape. The pictorial sections, but for their unfamiliar turn-of-the-century artwork, looked and felt as if they had peeled off a Hoe cylinder press the day before yesterday.

Bombs spared the American papers, but recent managerial policy has not—most were sold off in a blind auction last September. There were evidently only two bidders. I was one of them; a dealer from Williamsport, Pennsylvania, Timothy Hughes Rare Newspapers, was the other. Timothy Hughes owns a medium-sized pale-blue warehouse, tidily kept, filled with rows of industrial shelving; on the shelves rest about eighteen thousand newspaper volumes. He is an undemonstrative man with a small mustache, honest in his business dealings, who was formerly on the board of directors of the Little League Museum. His usual practice is to "disbind" the newspapers—that is, cut them out of their chronological context with a utility knife (you can hear the binding strings pop softly as the blade travels down the inner gutter of the volume)—and sell the eye-catching headline issues (Al Capone, the Lusitania, Bonnie and Clyde, Amelia Earhart) or issues containing primordial Coke ads or Thomas Nast illustrations, shrink-wrapped against white cardboard, at paper shows (where buyers gather to look over vintage postcards, baseball cards, posters, and other ephemera) or from his catalogue or his Web site. His father, jolly and self-effacing, was a sharpener of bandsaw blades (as was his grandfather); now his father and his brother, along with an amiable ex-schoolteacher named Marc, are employees of the company, filling orders, moving pallets of incoming volumes around with a forklift, writing catalogue copy, and gradually working down the inventory.

Hughes and I were bidding on the papers because their keepers craved the space they occupied. English law requires that the British Library preserve British newspapers in the original, but makes no such stipulation for foreign material, and in 1996, in an article in a newsletter, the library quietly announced its intent to rid itself of about sixty thousand volumes—almost all the non-Commonwealth papers printed after 1850 for which it had bought microfilm copies. (Included in the "overseas disposals project" were newspapers from Nazi Germany, pre-revolutionary Russia, and Occupied France.) "Increasing pressure on the storage facilities at the Colindale site" was the justification for this desperate act.

The plan, blessed by the British Library's board, was to offer the papers to libraries first; whatever the libraries left unclaimed would be sold to dealers; anything dealers didn't want was to be thrown away. Brian Lang, then the director of the British Library (he retired from the post earlier this summer), reiterated the plan in a letter he sent me in October of last year: "The intention is that runs of newspapers for which no bids have been received will be pulped."

"This is the perfect choice for whatever you're perpetrating."

If American libraries had been doing the job we trusted that they were doing over the past several decades, then the British Library's decision to auction off millions of pages of urban life, although it would mark a low point of cultural husbandry, would not be the sort of disastrous loss to future historians that it threatened to become when I found out about it. Fifty years ago, there were bound sets, even double sets, of all the major metropolitan dailies safely stored in libraries around the United States.

Today, you can flip through memoirs, biographies, scholarly studies, and original holograph letters of Joseph Pulitzer at Columbia (whose school of journalism Pulitzer founded), at the New York Public Library, and at the Library of Congress: works that describe his innovations in graphic design and recount his public squabble with Hearst over the Yellow Kid, a popular color cartoon that first appeared in the *World* in the eighteen-nineties—a squabble that begat the term "yellow journalism." But the *World* itself, the half-million-page masterpiece in the service of which Pulitzer stormed and swore and finally went blind, was microfilmed (wretchedly) in monochrome and thrown out by the New York Public Library, probably in 1950. Columbia said goodbye to its *World* at some point thereafter; the New-York Historical Society did so sometime in the early nineties.

Harvard University, the University of Chicago, the Chicago Public Library, and the Chicago Tribune Company once owned the Chicago *Tribune.* They don't now. (An employee of the reference department of the Chicago *Tribune* told me that he was "sorry to say and appalled to say" that the volumes were gone. "It was before my time.") The University of Chicago library produced a woefully bad microfilm copy of the Chicago *Tribune* in the fifties. The Library of Congress was quick to clear its shelves of the *World* and most of the *Tribune* and replace them with copies of the N.Y.P.L.'s and the University of Chicago's microfilm. Prints of that mid-century microfilm—edge-blurred, dark, gappy, with text cut off on some pages, faded to the point of illegibility on others—will now have to serve for patrons of the British Library, too.

All the major American newspaper repositories have long since bet the farm on film and given away, sold, or thrown out most of their original volumes published after 1880 or so. The Kansas State Historical Society, founded by a group of newspaper editors in 1875, had an unusually fine out-of-state-newspaper assemblage, including a pre-Civil War file of the New York *Tribune*, a long run of the Boston *Investigator*, and a large number of otherwise impossible-to-find Western and territorial papers. Then the society put up a new building that was smaller than it should have been and, in 1997, had an auction. One observer told me that the lots Kansas ended up selling were so unusual, so valuable, that a group of buyers got together ahead of time to divvy things up, so that the bidding wouldn't go completely insane. It was "once-in-a-lifetime stuff," this observer said. The next step, according to Patricia Michaelis, the director of the library and archives division, was to dispose of most of the society's comprehensive collection of original Kansas papers printed after 1875, offering them first to institutions and then throwing out the leavings. She believes that the original papers are doomed anyway: "They're just inherently going to crumble apart, no matter what you do to them, because of the acid content." About half the people who use the library come for the newspaper collection. Do they like the microfilm? Michaelis laughed. "Well, it's the only option we give them."

Everyone knows that newsprint, if left in the sun, quickly turns yellow and brittle (a connective wood ingredient called lignin, which newsprint contains in abundance, reacts with sunlight). Yet wood-pulp newspapers of fifty and a hundred years ago are often surprisingly well preserved. Binding is extremely im-

WARNING READ BEFORE USING

At Historic Newspaper Archives, in Rahway, New Jersey, volumes are gutted for birthday gifts. Photograph by Abelardo Morell.

portant. The stitching together of fifteen (or thirty or sixty) single issues of a paper into one large, heavy book does much to keep the sheets sound. The margins often become brown and flaky, since moist warm air reacts with the acidic compounds in the paper and weakens it, and the binding glues can go bad, but a little deeper inside the flatland of the tightly closed folio, the sheer weight of the text block squeezes out most of the air; the paper suffers a good deal less impairment as a result.

Many librarians, however, have managed to convince themselves, and us, that if a newspaper was printed after 1870 or so it will inevitably self-destruct or "turn to dust" any minute, soon, in a matter of a few years—1870 being the all-important date after which, in newsprint mills in this country, paper-making pulps consisting of cooked rags gradually began to give way to pulps made of stone-ground wood. Early on, fledgling microfilm companies fed the fear of impermanence with confident mispredictions. Charles Z. Case, an executive at Recordak, Kodak's microfilm subsidiary, wrote in 1936, "Since the adoption of wood-sulphite paper for newspaper printing, a newspaper file has had a life of from 5 to 40 years depending on the quality of the paper, the conditions of storage, and the degree of use." Thomas Martin, the assistant chief of the manuscript division of the Library of Congress in the thirties, agreed with the Recordak salesman: "Old wood-pulp files which have only a few years' duration remaining in them should be photographed on film as soon as satisfactory results can be obtained. In such cases we really have no choice but to make or take film copies; the original will soon crumble into dust."

But the originals didn't crumble into dust. In 1941, Keyes Metcalf, a microfilm pioneer and the director of the libraries at Harvard, predicted that the "total space requirements" of research libraries "will be reduced by paper disintegration." Then five, ten, twenty years went by, and the paper—even the supposedly ephemeral newsprint—was still there. So librarians began getting rid of it anyway.

A promotional photograph for Recordak from the nineteen-thirties shows a wall of volumes of the New York *Times* at the New York Public Library, heaped and ranked willy-nilly to heighten the sense of oppressiveness; in front of them stands a prim wooden cabinet full of Kodak-made microfilm. Recordak succeeded early in winning over Keyes Metcalf. Metcalf, who was then the chief of reference at the New York Public Library, bought two microfilm readers; later, at Harvard, he launched, with Rockefeller Foundation money, a large-scale project to film foreign newspapers, in order, as he wrote a friend, "to help push microphotography." Luther Evans, who eventually became a Librarian of Congress, made a name for himself in the thirties as the head of the W.P.A.'s Historical Records Survey, where he supervised a large amount of nearly unreadable make-work microfilming around the country. In those days, microfilm was shot on the same stock as movie film (on some prints you can still see sprocket perforations from the original negative), and one has a sense that the library administrators saw themselves in the role of studio moguls, bringing multivolume reference classics to the silver, or at least the gray-green, screen.

Microfilm had an air of enticing sneakiness as well—of important covert operations performed in the national interest. This tradition goes back to the siege of Paris, in 1870, when the Prussians cut all telegraph links to the city. In a peasant's disguise, René Dagron, already a microphotographer of note, sneaked his optical apparatus to Tours in wine barrels, and there photographed military communiqués at reduced size on emulsions that he gently rolled up, slid into quills, and tied to carrier pigeons. The birds, which had been plunging exhausted from the sky when burdened with heavy paper, now flapped to Paris without incident.

In the Second World War, microfilm again came to prominence. In 1942, a young but growing company called University Microfilms landed a contract with the Office of Strategic Services, later to become the C.I.A., to film millions of pages of Axis scientific papers and other documents gathered by British agents. Around the same time, the O.S.S. needed an efficient way to sort thousands of vacation photographs of Germany which it had solicited from the public in order to plan bombing runs. A forward thinker named John F. Langan hired a team of women to mount microfilm snippets of each vacation photo (along with selected stills from Axis newsreels) into a rectangular hole cut in an I.B.M. punch card that was coded to correspond to the subject of the photo. In "The Hole in the Card" (a company history published in 1966 by 3M's Filmsort subsidiary), Neil MacKay writes, "For example, if a request were received for a shot of a bridge in occupied France that the allies wanted blown up, the cards were mechanically sorted at high speed to segregate all 'bridge' cards. The film in the cards was then projected on a screen to select the exact shot wanted." Langan was aided by Vernon D. Tate (later M.I.T.'s librarian), who moved to the O.S.S. from the National Archives, where in the thirties he had supervised the filming and destruction of a boatload of primary sources. Tate wrote in 1942 that microfilm "ranks in importance with any secret military weapon thus far disclosed."

After the war, the most influential microfilm booster was a polymathic, bow-tie-wearing career librarian named Verner Clapp. Clapp became the No. 2 man at the Library of Congress under Luther Evans ("We're going places Verner," Evans wrote him in 1945, "and I'm very glad you're a good sailor"); after narrowly missing the chieftaincy himself, Clapp went on in 1956 to direct the new and very flush Council on Library Resources, which bestowed hundreds of thousands of Ford Foundation dollars on technologies of image shrinkage. One of Verner Clapp's cherished bulk-reducing projects was the Verac, built by the AVCO corporation (it was at work on the reëntry system for the Minuteman missile at the time)—a cubic-foot set of stacked photographic plates layered with a super-high-resolution emulsion that could hold a million page images, each accessible by a servomechanism that, as Clapp put it, "brings the addressed image into the scanning position through a paroxysmic effort of approximately one-tenth of a second's duration." The Verac could make you a hard copy (Clapp uses this Cold War term in 1964) or the image could be made to appear on a "vidicon," or closed-circuit-TV screen. It didn't work, though—the words were blurry. Or perhaps the blur accurately reproduces Clapp's own tears of frustration, for the paroxysmic Verac was an expensive

"It's very, very important that you try very, very hard to remember where you electronically transferred Mommy and Daddy's assets."

• •

failure. Like missile defense, leading-edge library automation is a money pit.

At the 1959 annual meeting of the National Microfilm Association, Clapp gave the keynote address, entitled "A Good Beginning." He spoke of a hoped-for day in which microfilm machines "can be made a personal accoutrement, as homely and as natural and as essential as the toothbrush, the ball-point pen, or as eyeglasses." He also told delegates that microfilm "has come to the forefront again and again in time of war, and some of its best-known achievements are associated with espionage." Most of his listeners that day were unaware that Clapp himself was a consultant for the C.I.A., and that since at least 1949, while he was still at the Library of Congress, he had been an intelligence contact with top-secret clearance.

Clapp's own C.I.A. file includes documents from 1953 and 1954 stating that his task was to "maintain liaison on mutual library matters as well as monitor certain CIA-financed Library of Congress activity." In Clapp's handwritten daily minutes, now held in the Library of Congress's manuscript division, there is a note from December, 1951, when he was chief assistant librarian—"Round up on CIA projects"—and then a list of names, including that of Frederick Wagman, later the director of the University of Michigan's library and president of the American Library Association, who was a lifelong microfilm enthusiast. Around the same time, Clapp notes that the "CIA contract is in mill."

All Verner Clapp's notes are on paper, easily read today. Clapp's C.I.A. file, on the other hand, looks to have been an unfortunate victim of the Cold War enthusiasm for micro-preservation: it apparently was inexpertly filmed at some point, and it has faded severely, as microfilm does when technicians don't take care to rinse off the hypo developer. The copy that the C.I.A. sent me is poignantly stamped with the words "Best Copy Available" on almost every nearly indecipherable page. Some of the pages are, though uncensored, completely unreadable. The same sort of cautionary language—"Best Copy Available"—accompanies printouts from microfilmed newspapers that one can order from the Library of Congress and the New York Public Library.

Vilified though it may be, groundwood pulp is one of the great inventions of the late nineteenth century: it gave us cheap paper, and cheap paper transformed the news. "All that it is necessary for a man to do on going into a paper-mill is to take off his shirt, hand it to the devil who officiates at one extremity, and have it come out 'Robinson Crusoe' at the other," the founder of the New York *Sun* wrote in 1837. But there were never enough shirts, and in 1854 rag shortages lifted the price of newsprint to alarming heights. The arrival of the brothers Pagenstecher, who in 1867 imported a German machine that shredded logs to pulp by jamming their ends against a circular, water-cooled grinding stone, brought paper prices way down—from twelve cents a pound in 1870, to seven cents a pound in 1880, to less than two cents a pound in 1900. The drop gave Pulitzer and Hearst the plentiful page space to sell big ads, and allowed their creations to flower into the gaudy painted ladies they had become by the first decade of the twentieth century.

There's no question that wood pulps are in general weaker than rag pulps; and old newsprint, especially, tears easily, and it can become exceedingly fragile if it is stored, say, on the cement floor of a library basement, near heating pipes, for a few decades. But there has never been a long-term study that attempted to plot an actual loss-of-strength curve for samples of naturally aging newsprint or, indeed, for samples of any paper. In the absence of real long-term data, predictions have relied on artificial-aging (or "accelerated aging") experiments, in which you bake a paper sample in a laboratory oven for a week or two and then belabor it with standardized tests. But paper has a complex and as yet ill-charted chemistry, with many different molecular and mechanical processes proceeding concurrently; the results of the tests, invoked with head-shaking gravity by library administrators, have been uniformly wrong.

Yet, in a way, all surviving newspaper collections, in and out of libraries, are taking part in a self-guided experiment in natural aging—an experiment that confutes the doctrine of newsprint's imminent disintegration. Peter Waters, a former head of the conservation lab at the Library of Congress, told me that he sees no reason that old groundwood-pulp paper can't hold its textual freight for "a hell of a long time" if it is stored in a cool, dry place. He notes that most of the cellulose-sundering chemical reactions that can happen to a book or a newspaper volume seem to take place in the first decade or so of its life; forty years of handling paper (Waters is a master bookbinder) tells him that the rate at which paper loses strength "slows down enormously" over time—the curve of decay levels out. There is a good chance, then, that a volume of the New York *World* that is doing O.K. at the age of ninety will be in pretty much the same shape when it is a hundred and eighty, assuming someone is willing to take decent care of it.

The size of newspapers is indispensable to our experience of their content. The newspaper reader proceeds nonlinearly, not as he would holding a typical book but circling around the opened double-page spread, perhaps clockwise, or counterclockwise, moving his whole head as well as his eyes, guided by island landmarks like photos and ads. Even papers that have no pictures at all have a visual exorbitance, a horizon-usurping presence that a microfilm's image (which one observer in the seventies likened to "kissing through a pane of glass") subverts and trivializes.

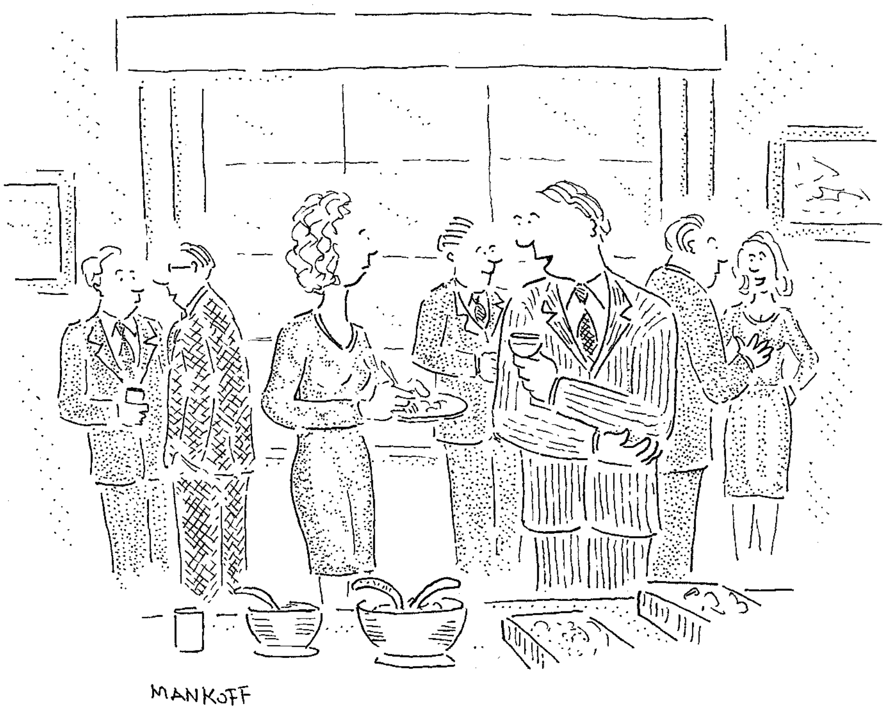
Still, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with microfilming. Taking tiny black-and-white pictures of things isn't objectionable so long as the picture-taking isn't destructive. In fact, microfilm can be extremely useful: it is portable and reproducible, and for many kinds of simple referential research it can serve as a stand-in or buffer copy that will reduce wear on irreplaceable and fragile originals. Nobody objects to postcards of Dürer woodcuts, or coffee-table books filled with reproductions of vintage ocean-liner posters, because the existence of handy copies of these works of art, in reduced size, does not induce museum curators to slice up or throw away the originals.

But the microfilming of old newspapers (which contain many thousands of woodcuts, by the way, not to mention Easter-egg cutouts, paper dolls, dress patterns, and illustrated sheet music) has, right from the beginning, been intimately linked with their destruction. The disbinding of every volume in order to speed production and avoid gutter shadow (the middle area of an open volume, where the pages turn down toward the binding, is a region hard to light and keep in focus) was, and still is, the preferred method of newspaper microphotography in the United States. The technique was systematically applied at the Library of Congress. Luther Evans described a pilot project to film a run of the Washington *Evening Star* in 1941: "The entire back of the binding was sheared off under a power cutter and the pages photographed individually." Evans called this "the ideal technique for microfilming bound newspapers." S. Branson Marley, who was a chief of the library's serial division, wrote years later of that disbinding, "This was a major decision, for it meant that in order to film a file for preservation, it was necessary to destroy it; once the volumes were cut for this purpose it was impractical, and usually impossible, to restore them."

There was a palpable glamour to microfilming in those early days, difficult though it may be to feel it now—a hot chemical whiff of cinematography and high-stakes intelligence work. And there was, as well, the entrepreneurial appeal of creating a product you could sell to other libraries. But the main reason that microfilm (and its higher-reduction cousin, microfiche) has always fascinated library administrators is, of course, that it gives them a way to clear the shelves—to "expand without expanding," in the words of a full-page University Microfilms advertisement in the July, 1976, issue of *Microform Review*. The picture in the ad is of a squeezed, feather-shedding American eagle, and the headline is "AMERICA'S SPACE PROGRAM IS IN TROUBLE":

> We don't have enough of it. Space. Not in the cities. Not on the land, and, as we don't need to tell you, not in the libraries. University Microfilms can give you more space. More space translates as more ways to expand without expanding, more options open.
>
> Serials Management in Microform is our own slum clearance program.

Newspaper collections were the first slums to be cleared (books came later), and, because the Library of Congress had the largest newspaper collection in the country, it was one of the first to go to work. (The Library of Congress had "files of American and foreign newspapers more complete and in greater amount than in any other library," one celebrant wrote a decade before the clearance began.) In 1950, an energetic soul named Clyde S. Edwards was put in charge of the library's serial division; an internal report for that year pointed out "the badly congested condition of the bound newspaper collections, and the urgent need for space in which to expand them." But the newspapers were never to have enough space again. Verner Clapp, microfilm futurist,



"I couldn't agree more—but, then again, I hate even non-lethal injections."

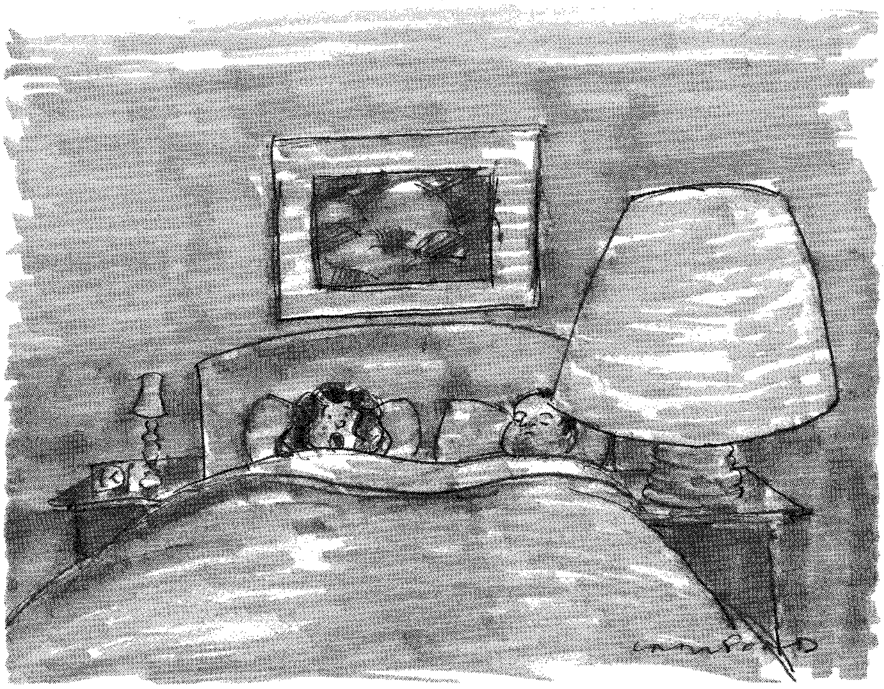
was by this time running day-to-day operations at the library (Luther Evans, the chief, was out of the country for long periods, on missions for UNESCO), and he was not a believer in "merely more of the same—ever and ever larger bookstacks and ever and ever more complicated catalogs." He subscribed to what is sometimes called the steady-space model. The ideal research library (as he described it in a 1964 book, "The Future of the Research Library") would reach a certain fixed physical size and stay there forever: high-powered technoshrinkage systems would allow librarians to "retire" their originals in favor of ever more densely packed micro-surrogates. (The curious twists of meaning that surround microfilming were not entirely lost on Clapp. "It is an art," he told the conventioneers in 1959, "dedicated to preservation, yet it is often practiced as a preparation for deliberate destruction.")

Rather than putting up more shelves for the newsprint collection or, if necessary, building or leasing a warehouse—traditional reactions to a space shortage—the Library of Congress responded in 1950 by abandoning the binding and storing of many new newspapers: incoming papers were discarded after a few months, as soon as commercial microfilm arrived to substitute for them. That practice saved dramatically on binding costs, thus helping to subsidize the cost of the microfilm. But there was only one sure way to relieve the overcrowding, Edwards advised in a later report: "I am convinced that the only solution to this problem lies in an intelligently planned reduction of the original files."

In a "conference decision," the library's managers sanctioned, as Marley put it, "the disposal to other libraries of bound newspapers replaced by microfilm." An unobtrusive footnote follows Marley's innocent-sounding sentence: "Volumes for which there are no takers are destroyed." None of this epochal activity, in which the Library of Congress began its slow betrayal of an unknowing nation, was mentioned in its published annual reports.

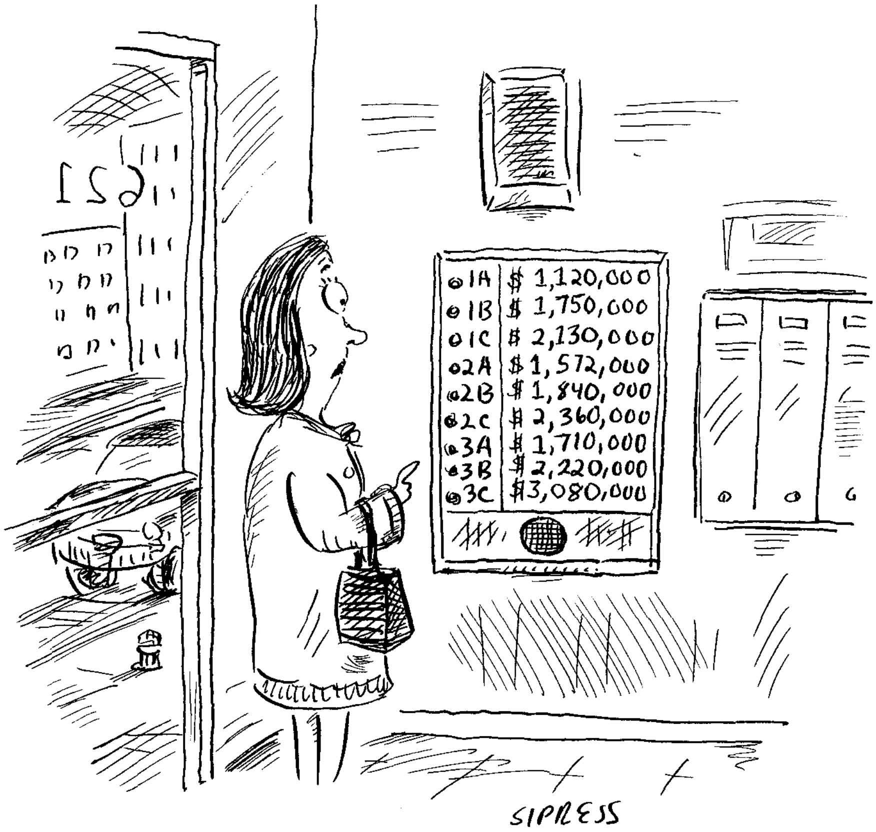
Volumes for which there are no takers are destroyed. Increasingly, there were no takers, because such is the prestige of our biggest library that whatever its in-house theoreticians come to believe—however anathematic to the ideals of reasoned stewardship—other research libraries will soon believe as well. The cleanout continues. Since the mid-eighties, the vast U.S. Newspaper Program, a government project whose aims are to catalogue as many newspapers in the country as possible (a worthy goal) and to microfilm those local papers which were passed over in earlier decades, has given away to libraries about forty-five million dollars in so-called "preservation" money—and zero dollars for storage space. The National Endowment for the Humanities, which pays for the U.S. Newspaper Program (and funds a related enterprise, the Brittle Books Program), makes no requirement that libraries actually preserve, in the physical sense of "reshelve," originals after they have been sent out for federally funded filming. ("The N.E.H. has never taken a position on the eventual disposition of brittle volumes that have been microfilmed to preserve their intellectual content," George Farr, the director of the N.E.H.'s Office of Preservation, wrote me. "We believe that this is a decision that is more appropriate for the grantee libraries to make.") The effect of all this N.E.H. microfilm money has been to trigger a last huge surge of discarding, as libraries use federal preservation grants to solve their local space problems. Not since the monk-harassments of sixteenth-century England has a government tolerated, indeed stimulated, the methodical eradication of so much primary source material.

Surely this material is all available on the Web by now, or will be soon? In time, eighty or a hundred years of a great urban paper could well become a source for a historical database of richness and utility. But at the moment the scanning and storing and indexing of hundreds of thousands of pages of tiny type, along with halftone photos and color illustrations, would be a fearsomely expensive job; and even if money were limitless there would remain the formidable technical challenge of achieving acceptable levels of resolution using digital cameras for formats as large as those of a newspaper spread. And high-quality digital facsimiles of our major papers will never exist unless we decide right now to do a much better job of holding on to the originals—even the mangy ones with crumbly edges. You can't digitize something that has been sold off piecemeal or thrown away, after all; and attempts to scan the page images of newspapers from old microfilm have not worked well—and will never work well—because the microfilm itself is often at the squint-to-make-it-out level. HarpWeek, a venture that offers a digital copy of *Harper's Weekly* on the Web, spent tens of thousands of dollars trying



"Frank! Frank, honey, wake up! Your lamp—it's humongous!"

to scan the available microfilm but found that thirty per cent of the resultant images were bad. In the end, the company worked from original sets of the journal, which had to be disbound so that the pages could be placed flat on the scanner.



Amid the general devastation, there are some librarians of foresight whose accomplishments are as yet unsung. The Boston Public Library, owing to the belief of Charles Longley, the recently retired curator of microtexts and newspapers, that his institution's accumulated newspaper files are "part of the City's own heritage and the Library would be remiss in not retaining them," not only has held on to all its existing collections but has continued to lay away the recent output of Boston and selected Massachusetts papers, wrapped in brown paper, right up through the present; and it has taken ownership of important sets of bound Boston newspapers once owned by Harvard and other regional libraries. Longley was lucky: his views were shared by the city's longtime librarian, the late Philip McNiff; very often, a change of administration proves fatal to a great collection.

At Ohio State, a librarian named Lucy Caswell, who wears quiet silk scarves and directs the Cartoon Research Library, is almost single-handedly attempting to rebuild a bound-volume collection of national scope through gifts and by buying back for scholarly use material offered by dealers and collectors, most notably the lifetime harvest of Bill Blackbeard and his San Francisco Academy of Comic Art.

Aside from what Lucy Caswell and Charles Longley have been able to save, the annihilation of once accessible collections of major daily papers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries is pretty close to total. "Pennsylvania was one of the first states to undertake statewide microfilming and destruction of its newspaper files," Bill Blackbeard told me. "They did an extraordinarily, brutally thorough job of it. Unfortunately, some of the earliest color Sunday comic strips were printed in Philadelphia newspapers. So I never have gotten to see very many of those." The Pennsylvania State Library did not keep its original bound set of the Philadelphia *Inquirer*, and neither did the Philadelphia Free Library—a librarian there wrote me that wood-pulp newsprint "falls apart." Bell & Howell Information and Learning (formerly University Microfilms) will, however, sell the whole *Inquirer* to you on spools of archival polyester, encased in little white cardboard boxes, for $621,515.

Bell & Howell now owns microfilm negatives for most of the big papers in the country; and, to the extent that there are no originals left to scan when scanning resolution improves, its "master" microfilm (some of it inherited from defunct filming labs and of poor quality) will perforce become the basis for any future digital versions of old newspapers, access to which the company will also control. Bell & Howell has successfully privatized our past: whether we like it or not, the company possesses a near-monopoly on the reproduction rights for the chief primary sources of twentieth-century history.

Where did all the spurned papers go? Many were thrown out—and continue to be thrown out as state filming projects progress—but a colossal residue rests at a company called Historic Newspaper Archives, the biggest name in the birth-date business. If you call Hammacher Schlemmer, say, or Potpourri, or the Miles Kimball catalogue, to order an "original keepsake newspaper" for the day a loved one was born, you're buying something that was once part of a library's collection. Historic Newspaper Archives has twenty-five thousand square feet of warehouse space in Rahway, New Jersey; there innumerable partly gutted volumes wait in lugubrious disorder on tall industrial shelves and in four-foot piles and on pallets. I paid a visit one winter afternoon. The Christmas rush was over, and the place was quiet. Torn sheets, sticking out from damaged volumes overhead, slapped and fluttered in a warm breeze that came from refrigerator-size heaters mounted on the ceiling. When an order arrived for a particular date, a worker would pull down a volume of the *Herald Tribune*, say, slice out the issue, neaten the rough edges using an electric trimmer, and slip it in a clear vinyl sleeve for shipping. Every order comes with a "certificate of authenticity" printed in florid script. The *Herald Tribune* set that Historic Newspaper Archives is gradually dismembering is bound in pale-blue cloth and is in very good condition (where it hasn't gone under the knife, that is); its bookplates announce that it was the gift of Mrs. Ogden Reid, who owned and ran the *Tribune*, more or less, in the forties and fifties. It is a multi-edition file: five editions for each day are separately bound. I would guess that this was at one time the *Herald Tribune's* own corporate-historical set; Mrs. Reid no doubt believed that she was insuring its careful continuance by donating it to a library. Hy Gordon, the no-nonsense general manager of the archives, told me that he believes he got his *Tribunes* from the New York Public Library. Gordon sold me one volume from the set (including rotogravure sections and color cartoons by Rea Irvin), at a discounted price of three hundred dollars plus shipping.

(The N.Y.P.L.'s librarians divested themselves of their *Tribune* run, but they must be commended for keeping one of their huge sets of the New York *Times*, from 1857 right up through 1985, several decades of which exist in a special rag-paper library edition. They will let you read from it in Room 315, where "semi-rare" material is served under supervision. No research library, I believe, has saved the *Times* in paper over the past decade; the paper now prints thousands of color photographs a year, but you wouldn't know that from the microfilm.)

I told Hy Gordon that I thought some librarians had exaggerated the severity of newsprint's deterioration. "Oh yeah, yeah, it doesn't fall apart," he agreed. "The ends might crack, but that's all. The newspaper's still fine."

I said I was distressed that so many libraries were getting rid of their bound newspapers.

"Don't be distressed," he said. "There are a lot of things more important in life."

Are there really? More important than the fact that this country has strip-mined a hundred and twenty years of its history? I'm not so sure. Historic Newspaper Archives owns what is probably the largest "collection" of post-1880 United States papers anywhere in the country, or the world, for that matter—a ghastly anti-library. The company owns it in order to destroy it. "Here are rare and original newspapers with assured value many from the Library of Congress," the archives' brochure boasts—all for sale for thirty-nine dollars and fifty cents an issue.

In April of 1999, several months after my visit to Hy Gordon's warehouse in Rahway, I came across a brief description of the British Library's disposal project on its Web site. I called up a friendly-sounding person named Bhavna Tailor, who is in charge of Acquisitions and Stock Control at the British Library's Newspaper Library ("stock control," I have since learned, is English librarianship's gentle phrase for "getting rid of all the stuff you don't want"), and I did my best to convey to her the preciousness of the things on her disposal list, and the mediocrity of some of the microfilm copies in which the British Library was placing its trust. The same day, I E-mailed her a letter. "My hope is that this extraordinary trove can be kept intact and available for future scholarship," I said, "not cut up and sold piecemeal by dealers." I would be willing to pay for removal and storage if I had to, I told her, either via a nonprofit or as a private citizen, if it came down to a choice between that and seeing the papers irretrievably dispersed. Ten days later, I got a response from Tailor. She would keep my letter on file, she said, "and if there are no takers for the remainder of the US titles, then I will contact you and we can take matters from there." I forwarded the list to Lucy Caswell, at Ohio State, because she was the only librarian I knew who was actively taking in large wood-pulp back files; but she was still trying to digest the six tractor-trailer loads of material that her library had bought from Bill Blackbeard.

In August, after sending two further notes of inquiry, I got a letter from the British Library, attached to which was a disposal list amounting to about a hundred and thirty newspapers and other miscellaneous periodicals—more than three times the number of titles that the library listed in its newsletter and on its Web site. The New York *World* was still there—unbelievably, no library had snapped it up—as were most of the other big papers; and there were pictorial vehicles, like *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* and the Chicago *Graphic*, and a bewildering array of ethnic papers and periodicals (the *Gaelic American* from 1916-19, the *American Hebrew* from 1905-20, the Boston *Dielli*, the Jersey City *Svoboda*, the New York *Irish World* from 1880-1946, the *British Californian*, the Chicago *Katolik*, the New York *Vienybe Lietuvninku*, the *France Amérique*, and on and on), and political papers (volumes of the Yiddish socialist New York *Forward* from 1917-75, for instance, and of the New York *Worker* from 1943-68), and a number of uncommon trade periodicals, such as *Combustion* and *Fur Trade Review* (both from the thirties). "It has been decided," Bhavna Tailor stiffly wrote, "that it would not be appropriate for us to donate the remaining material to individuals rather than to institutions." The material, she said, would be "offered to the highest bidder." The list was evidently sent out to newspaper dealers at about the same time I got it; the deadline for bids was September 30, 1999.

As I stared at the titles, I felt a wave of premonitory misery. The timing of this development was not good. I was two years behind in everything; I owed letters of thanks, apology, correction, or friendly encouragement; and my wife and I had drained our cash reserves, having just bought an eighteenth-century house with no doorknobs in Maine. I didn't want to get caught up in some kind of mind-consuming, hideously expensive wrangle with the British Library.

But, gee, the list was long. The library, while perhaps technically complying with disclosure rules, was trying to minimize the scope and ruthlessness of its deaccessioning. And then there was the phrase "to the highest bidder." Apparently, it was a matter of indifference to the library's managers whether the newspaper collection held rarities or not; they were perfectly willing to act in a way that would all but guarantee its quietus at the hands of the paper knackers. They wanted the money. So I made calls, wrote letters, hired lawyers, formed a nonprofit corporation, and appealed to the British Library's sense of decency.

It takes time to microfilm back files amounting to millions of pages; at the Library of Congress, the "planned reduction" went fairly slowly at first. Blackbeard told me that when he first began saving newspapers, in the late sixties and early seventies, the library still had a huge collection, handsomely bound, stored in a naval warehouse on Duke Street, in Alexandria, Virginia. "They had virtually every major American newspaper from a large city," Blackbeard said.

A few times a year, the library would publish in its Information Bulletin a list of the papers it was replacing with film: if no federal agencies wanted them, they could go to other libraries or nonprofit organizations; if no nonprofits wanted them, they went into dealers' trucks; if dealers had got their fill, they went to the dump. "Their files were just immaculate, white paper, good-looking stuff," Blackbeard said. "They couldn't wait to get rid of them."

Two documents together disclose the extent of the Library of Congress's print-purgation program over the past several decades. One is a forty-six-page mimeographed list entitled "Holdings of American Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Newspapers Printed on Wood Pulp Paper," prepared by the Library of Congress's serial division in May of 1950, just before Clyde Edwards strode onto the scene to begin disposing of things. The other document is a detailed inventory, prepared in the summer of 1998, entitled "19th and 20th Century U.S. Newspapers in Original Format: Inventory of Volumes Held in Remote Storage."

According to the mimeographed 1950 count, there were more than sixty-seven thousand volumes of post-1870 wood-pulp newspapers in the Library of Congress—everything from the Alaska *Daily Empire* from 1917-49, in a hundred and five volumes, to the Laramie, Wyoming, *Republic & Boomerang* from 1916-49, in a hundred and three volumes. From that gigantic landmass of print, a few thousand volumes now remain. Whispers of this secret history are to be found in the small card catalogue kept behind the reference desk in the newspaper reading room. Above the typed entry for the New York *Herald Tribune*, for instance, is a handwrittten note: "All on film—(817 vols discarded)."

"Generally, we retain the ink print until we have a microfilm available," Diane Kresh, who is in charge of the Library of Congress's Preservation Directorate, said to me on one of my visits to the library. I asked her if she thought that was a good policy.

"I do," she said. "I've seen bound newspapers that have become so embrittled that they can't be used. They are still intact—things aren't falling on the floor. But you can't open them, and you can't turn the page."

So the library got rid of the newspapers because of their condition, not because of space requirements? Or was it some combination?

"Oh, no, it wouldn't be the space," Kresh said. "It's the inherent vice of deteriorating paper, and particularly newsprint."

But it was the space, unquestionably. The Library of Congress once owned the Chicago *Tribune*, the Detroit *News*, the New York *Forward*, and the New York *Times* in ultra-durable thirties rag-paper editions—printed, in other words, on stock that is significantly stronger than practically all book paper of the twentieth century. The library banished these titles anyway. Charles La Hood, the chief of photoduplication at the Library of Congress in the seventies, wrote, "Microfilming came at a propitious time, as the Library of Congress was experiencing an acute space problem in its newspaper collection."

When I pointed out to Kresh that ex-Library of Congress newspapers find avid buyers every day, and thus could not be nearly as decrepit as she was implying, she admitted that "there is, obviously, ultimately a storage issue."

Why, one wants querulously to ask, is our national library so often in the throes of a space crisis? (In 1997, the library's Working Group on Reference and Research described "a crisis of space, in particular in general collections stacks.") A year of a daily paper would fill fifty-two volumes and occupy less than half the Barbie aisle in a Toys R Us. Compared with the sort of human artifacts that the Smithsonian Institution must store (locomotives, dynamos, space capsules), or those that the National Trust is entrusted to protect (office buildings, battlefields, neighborhoods), newspapers and books are marvellously compact. Lack of money isn't the problem. The library has spent huge sums on microfilming, and its preservation budget is more than eleven million dollars a year—enough to build and

"Mrs. Jennings, can Billy come out and smoke?"

outfit a warehouse the size of a Home Depot, which would hold a century of newsprint. Are the library's senior managers unable to plan for the inevitable growth of the single most important hoard of human knowledge in the country? Why is it so difficult for this great research institution to do what any steadily growing concern—a successful pet-food discounter, say, or a distributor of auto parts, or a museum of sculpture—manages to do year after year, without fuss?

I asked James Billington, the current Librarian of Congress, what he thought about making room for original papers. Billington, a Russian historian who was, in the fifties, a C.I.A. analyst under Allen Dulles, has raised large quantities of private money to pay for the library's American Memory digitization project. "The embrittlement process is not just a question of degrading—these things disintegrate," Billington said. "There's always a tradeoff. The happiness and satisfaction of seeing the whole thing in the original is a short-lived privilege for today's audience. It's likely to be, in the real world, at the expense of the variety and richness of what future generations will be able to see in the microfilm version."

Inherent vice indeed. Everything goes wrong in time—the germane question is whether the Library of Congress, and the many institutions that followed its example, got rid of things that were, at the time of their jettisoning, both usable and valuable. I bought, on eBay, a 1908 volume of the Panama City *Star & Herald* (published in English during the building of the Panama Canal); it has the Library of Congress's oval stamp on the spine. From a dealer, I bought a volume of the New York *Post* for April, 1943, also spine-stamped by the Library of Congress. Both these objects are in excellent fettle; they can be opened and the pages turned with impunity.

Timothy Hughes, who sold me a volume of the New York *World-Telegram* from February, 1934, couldn't say for sure where he got it. "It possibly came from the Library of Congress," he wrote me. "I buy from a variety of sources and even my sources get them from various people—[the items] often get passed down to three or four dealers before they end up in my hands, so who knows where they originally came from."

ONE HUNDRED WHITE-SIDED DOLPHINS ON A SUMMER DAY

1
Fat,
black, slick,
galloping in the pitch
of the waves, in the pearly

fields of the sea,
they leap toward us,
they rise, sparkling, and vanish, and rise sparkling,
they breathe little clouds of mist, they lift perpetual smiles,

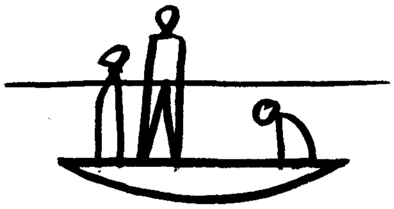
they slap their tails on the waves, grandmothers and grandfathers
enjoying the old jokes,
they circle around us,
they swim with us—

2
a hundred white-sided dolphins
on a summer day,
each one, as God himself
could not appear more acceptable

a hundred times,
in a body blue and black threading through
the sea foam,
and lifting himself up from the opened

tents of the waves on his fishtail,
to look
with the moon of his eye
into my heart,

The *World-Telegram's* pages have yellowed, especially at the outer margins, where light and air have penetrated, but they are whole and sound. You can open this magnificent public diary without harming it; you can turn its pages without trouble; you can peruse it with a moment's pleasure or a day's fascination. Joseph Mitchell, who was already free-lancing at *The New Yorker*, writes about the arrival of Emma Goldman in the United States after years of exile. "The anarchist wore a snakeskin print dress and a Paisley shawl," he writes, and a photo confirms it. A. J. Liebling, another *World-Telegram* writer, gets a color quote from a cabbie while covering a violent taxi strike: "I come first. The customer comes second, and I don't care if you miss your train, mister." Heywood Broun prints a letter he got from Robert Benchley. Gretta Palmer, on the woman's page, says that the speakeasy ended the male-only bar, but that segregation is returning: "Don't the men like us any more now that their judgement is unclouded by the gasoline in the old-fashioned gin?" In a sports section, a huge cartoon has Robert Moses, the new city parks commissioner, hitting a hole in one, because he has promised to spruce up the city's golf courses. And on February 22nd there is a nice anonymous lead—maybe by Liebling again?—on page 1: "Miss Florence La Bau, an alumna of Goucher College and Columbia University, a young woman of wealth and social position in Ridge-



3
and find there
pure, sudden, steep, sharp, painful
gratitude
that falls—

I don’t know—either
unbearable tons
or the pale, bearable hand
of salvation

on my neck,
lifting me
from the boat’s plain plank seat
into the world’s

4
unspeakable kindness.
It is my sixty-third summer on earth
and, for a moment, I have almost vanished
into the body of the dolphin,

into the moon-eye of God,
into the white fan that lies at the bottom of the sea
with everything
that ever was, or ever will be,

supple, wild, rising on flank or fishtail—
singing or whistling or breathing damply through blowhole
at top of head. Then, in our little boat, the dolphins suddenly gone,
we sailed on through the brisk cheerful day.

—*Mary Oliver*

wood, N.J., was doing a fourth mate’s job on the freighter Wichita when the ship plodded into port today with a cargo of human hair from China, tea from Formosa, silk from Japan, sugar from the Philippines and two strange bears from the mystery land of Tibet.” Reading a paper like this is not the only way to understand the lost past life of a city, but no other way will enclose you so completely within one time stratum’s universe of miscellaneous possibility. Nothing makes an amateur historian of you with more dispatch.

Real historians of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries aren’t reading the old newspapers very much anymore, though—not page by page and month by month, for pleasure—and the texture and content of historical writing has, one suspects, undergone subtle changes (thinnings of specificity, losses of groundedness) as a consequence. Historians don’t read the old papers because their libraries don’t keep the old papers to read, and microfilm is a brain-poaching, gorge-lifting trial to browse. It’s oddly difficult sometimes to do the equivalent of turning the page, especially when you’re handling heavily scratched or faded microfilm and must crank up the magnification to make out the words. (This is particularly true at the Library of Congress, where the reader-printers in the newspaper room are in such poor repair that some of them pull forward rhythmically on their own at times, their takeup reels afflicted by a sort of electro-parkinsonism.) You feel as if you were mowing an endless monochromatic lawn, sliding the film gate this way and that, fiddling with the image-rotation dial and the twitchily restive motor switch. If you have a date and a page number, you look up that one citation and leave; you aren’t tempted to spend several hours splashing in the daily contextual marsh. “Certainly the patron’s desire to browse through back issues of newspapers is almost completely gone—people rarely browse through microfilm”: so wrote E. E. Duncan in *Microform Review* in 1973. At the National Archives of Ontario, one of the microfilm readers had an airsickness bag taped to it; since the seventies, image ergonomists have known of a kind of motion sickness which seems to be caused by the difficulty of visually tracking the creep and lurch of passing textscapes. Ben Procter, a recent biographer of William Randolph Hearst, appears to us stoic, brave, unflinching, because he was actually willing to read what Hearst published. “Oh, yes, microfilm, yes,” he told Brian Lamb, on “Booknotes.” “It can be brutal, but you find out a great deal about the man and about his papers.”

There are nice things about microfilm, too: the congenial clicks of your neighbor’s forward button; the way the chosen image fuzzes and bows modestly off-screen as you press “Print,” as if it must retire to another room to change; the warbly whine of the reel’s motor when the glass plate lifts to let the film rewind at straightaway speed; the loud confident slaps of the freed leader which proclaim to everyone in the room that someone has finished his or her research. Because microfilm readers frame text arbitrarily, conferring equal eye weight on all segments of a page, you occasionally discover tiny items you wouldn’t have seen if you read the paper conventionally, favoring the areas that its editors and layout artists expected you to look at first. And, of course, questing scholars cheerfully endure the ocular and neckular ordeal of microfilm if they have good reason to—if they want to make copies, or if the paper is indeed so fragile that it can’t be touched without damage. But librarians have misled us: for more than fifty years, they have disparaged paper’s residual strength, while remaining as “blind as lovers” (as Allen Veaner, former editor of *Microform Review*, once wrote) to the failings and infirmities of film.

The infirmities are worrying. After nitrate film stock proved hazardous, a compound called cellulose acetate became, in the nineteen-forties, the medium in which microphotographers placed their faith. At the National Bureau of Standards, experimenters baked samples of it in an oven, tested them for residual strength (the research was subsidized by "several manufacturers of photographic films and equipment"), and declared that "cellulose acetate motion-picture film appears to be very promising for permanent records." Charles Z. Case, of Recordak, seized on this wishful governmental verdict, assuring library administrators (some of whom didn't need much convincing) that his company's product was "in the same category of permanence as the finest book-papers."

Unfortunately, acetate has a way of releasing (or "off-gassing," to use the conservator's term) the acetic acid employed in its manufacture; over the years, afflicted microfilms can begin to shrink, buckle, bubble, or stick together in a solid illegible lump. Responding to what a former chief of microforms at the New York Public Library called "the dreaded vinegar syndrome"—so named for its sinus-clearing smell—the industry switched, by the mid-eighties, from acetate to rip-resistant polyester. But millions of rolls of acetate images remain in libraries; indeed, a sizable portion of the preservation budget in some large institutions now must go toward the reduplication, with an attendant loss of detail, of old micro-negatives or positive prints onto fresh polyester.

Better plastic doesn't solve all the problems, either, since microfilm's emulsion—the soft layer of gelatin and silver that holds the image—has vulnerabilities as well. The silver can rise to the surface (a condition called "mirroring"), and it can develop colorful "redox blemishes"; a 1981 study at the Public Archives of Canada revealed that thirty-five per cent of a sample of rolls of microfilm had some redox damage. Certain fungi prosper in microfilm's gelatin, too; in 1991, a survey of microfilm masters in the University of Florida's collection (which includes "the only extant copy of many Florida newspapers") found that more than half had fungal troubles.

According to Allen Veaner, microfilm is the "invisible product," meaning that librarians file it away unlooked-at. "Serious defects often do not show up until months or years later," Veaner writes, "when an angry faculty member or student complains of an illegible or missing page, or when images have faded owing to faulty processing." Nancy Kraft, a librarian at the State Historical Society of Iowa, estimates that about a third of her library's reels of pre-1960 microfilm

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SHOWCASE BY
BRIGITTE LACOMBE

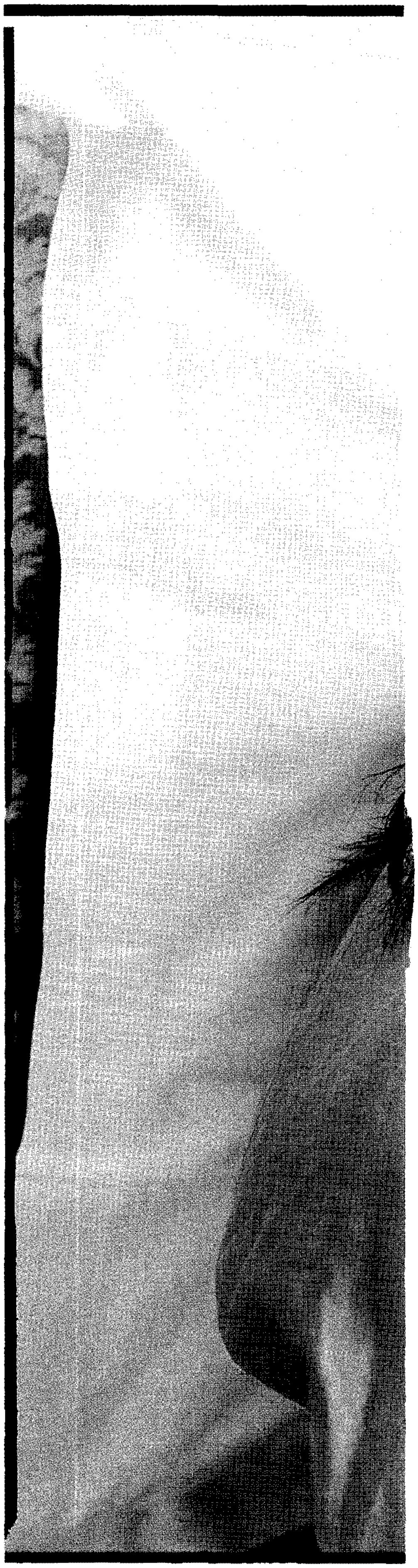
ICE QUEEN

You want her to be a little taller than she is, in the way you always want your stars to be just so, as they are in the mind. Or maybe you want her to be a little less precise when you see her live, this thirty-four-year-old Something Else attacking the fantastically guttural notes she sings like an A-plus student on all three of her well-crafted solo albums. Because you know it's in there—an emotional messiness that reminds you of Judy Garland, with her guts and roses.

Like Garland, Björk was a prodigy: the responsible child of hippie parents, she cut an album in her native Iceland at eleven. Then, as the lead singer for the Sugarcubes, Iceland's first internationally successful rock group, she helped organize tours, looked after the band, and didn't take shit from anyone: a new kind of pinup. When she sings "Thought I could organize freedom / How Scandinavian of me," this control freak knows what she's talking about.

Now she's in a movie, Lars von Trier's "Dancer in the Dark," which opens the New York Film Festival in September. If you read this year's coverage from Cannes—where Björk won the best-actress award for her portrayal of a woman going blind who takes the rap for a murder she didn't commit—you probably know that she and von Trier didn't get along. (He's from Denmark. Iceland was part of the Danish kingdom until 1944. You do the math.) Still, her controversial performance astonished the Cannes audience. It shouldn't have. Björk has been preparing for "Dancer" for nearly twenty years. She knows how to hold an audience, both because she's worked for it and because it comes naturally to her. She's as primal and theatrical as the Icelandic sagas, which she should adapt into a song cycle in true Björk style—a style that von Trier, in his shallow and cruel film, couldn't obscure.

—*Hilton Als*



of Iowa newspapers (seven thousand reels, 8.4 million pages) "represent files that will have to be refilmed"—in the event, that is, that there are originals left on shelves somewhere to refilm.

When the N.E.H. began paying for mass-microfilming projects, in the early eighties, it compelled some improvements in standards; and labs such as Preservation Resources, in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and the Northeast Document Conservation Center, in Andover, Massachusetts, do fine work. Nevertheless, serious mistakes still occur. Nicholas Noyes, the director of the Maine Historical Society's library, told me that in one recent job a company failed to film an entire year's worth of newspaper issues. Fortunately, his library's policy is to save its originals: the year isn't lost forever. Steve Dalton, who moderates the Northeast Document Conservation Center's popular "School for Scanning" conference, said in 1998 that one of the benefits of microfilming compared with digital scanning is that microfilmers have had time to learn from their mistakes: "I must also admit there is still a ton of really poor-quality microfilm that's produced—hopefully not here at N.E.D.C.C., but it is produced nonetheless."

The fading problem is the most serious one, in my experience. Recently, I tried to read the microfilm of a 1914 issue of *Foster's Weekly Democrat & Dover Enquirer*, published in Dover, New Hampshire. There were whole pages in which little more than the headlines was legible. I was able to read:

> NORTHAM COLONISTS
> HOLD MEETING
>
> Two Interesting Papers Read
> at January Session

And then, below, there was a column of nothing. No originals of this weekly survive, as far as I know: the New Hampshire State Library and the Dover Public Library discarded theirs. The new head librarian at the Dover library conceded that she's been frustrated at times, looking up a particular article on her library's film and finding that "you just can't read it." On the other hand, as she pointed out, there's more space in the library. "It's so wonderful to have a hundred and fifty years of newspapers in a cabinet," she said.

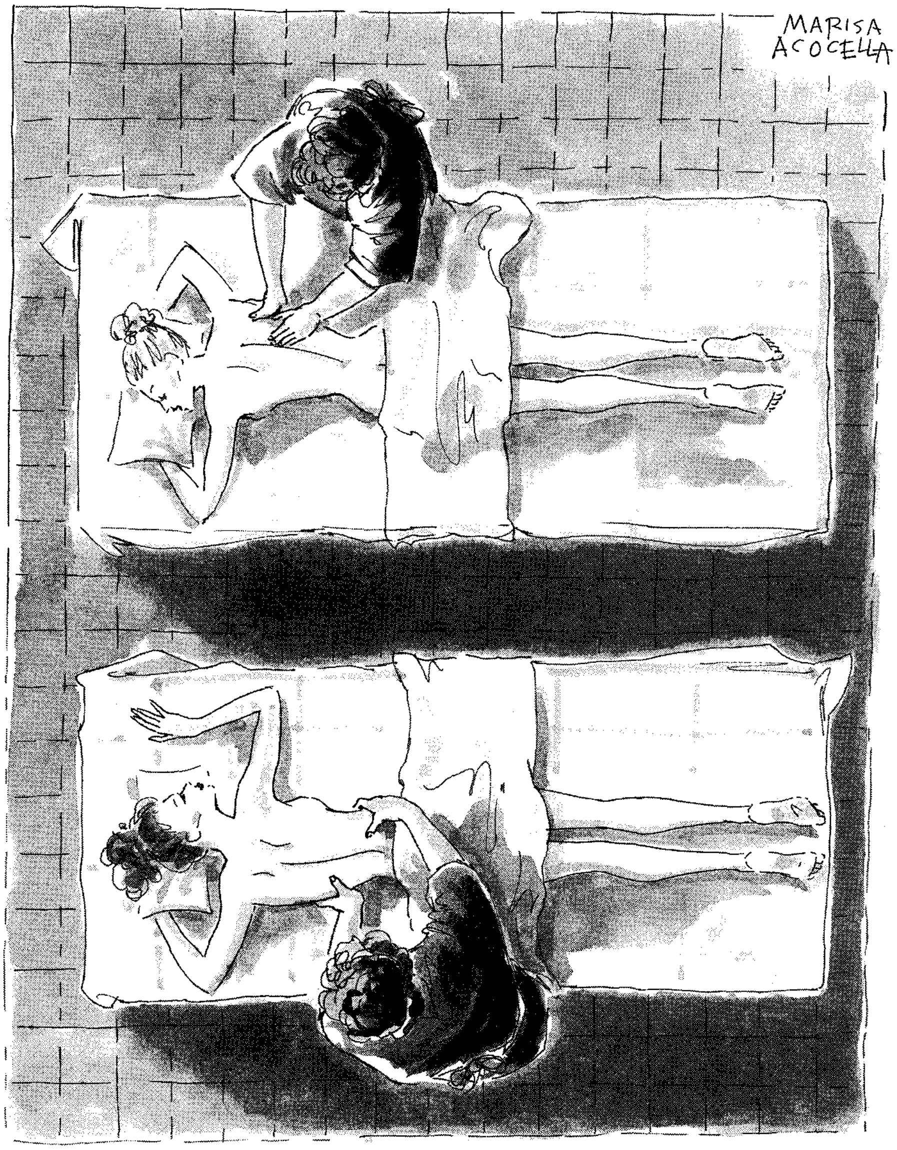
Few film copies of old newspapers are complete—not necessarily because the microfilmers skipped pages by mistake (although they have certainly been known to do that) but because the original run lacked issues, or had items razored out by maniacal collectors. But, in a marvellous bit of redefinitional insanity, a microfilmed newspaper is "considered complete" by the Library of Congress (according to its reference guide "Newspapers in Microfilm") if "only a few issues per month are missing." If collection managers in major research libraries replace their own imperfect, even badly broken original runs of a given daily paper with copies of a filmed set that, though known to be incomplete, is "considered complete" by indexers, and believed to be complete by trusting buyers, the replacement process necessarily leaves permanent, unfixable impairments in the documentary record. Before, we had four different Ace combs in our pocket, each with a different missing tooth; now we have four miniature photographs of the same Ace comb with the same missing tooth. If that tooth happens to contain an article about the building of the new gymnasium in the high school where your parents met, or about the trolley-car line that once went down your street, forget it, you're out of luck.

"I don't bug you about your catnip. Don't bug me about my Martinis."

Some years ago, David Bosse, who is now the librarian of the Memorial Libraries, in Deerfield, Massachusetts, was compiling an annotated list of maps published in northern newspapers during the Civil War, when he found that the microfilm for some of the Chicago papers had "significant gaps"—gaps that couldn't be filled, because he could find no original paper for that period. Worse, he discovered a six-month void in the filmed record of the New York *Sun* for 1862. (The *Sun* is one of the great New York dailies; in a later era, it published Don Marquis's "Archy and Mehitabel" columns.) "What I discovered was that everyone I contacted had purchased the film from the New York Public Library," Bosse said. "Some of them, I think, probably had runs of originals, decided to get rid of them, and replaced them with film—and there was a six-month gap in the film." Bosse was unable to locate any extant originals of the *Sun* which could supplement what the film lacked.

Lucy Caswell was working on a study of the first woman political cartoonist, Edwina Dumm, who drew for the Columbus *Monitor* in the teens. Caswell had a scrapbook of original cartoons cut out of the paper, which Dumm had given her before she died, but they lacked dates and surrounding news. Using the microfilm of the *Monitor*, she found some of the cartoons, but some she couldn't find, as a result either of missing issues or of filming errors. Caswell tried to locate an original set of the paper, but there wasn't one: the copy in Columbus had been destroyed after microfilming, and the State Historical Society's copy had been given or sold to a man in Detroit who cut it up for the circus ads and threw the rest away.

I asked Caswell what she thought, given this sort of difficulty, about the prudence of keeping originals. "You're talking to somebody who values the object, so I would always keep the paper master," she said. "I know my cohorts in the past have not." Caswell is diplomatic, as I'm not, about the losses: "I think that people did it in good conscience under circumstances that in some cases were beyond their control. Boards of trustees and administrators were saying, 'You have to do this, we can't afford to do otherwise.' " She senses a change of outlook, though. "It seems to me that maybe, for lots of reasons, our collective consciousness about history is getting a little better, and maybe we won't repeat the errors we've made in the past."



"He didn't want to end it, so I told him I wanted to get married."

• •

All this, I hope, explains why, once I'd got the list of available titles from the British Library, I formed the American Newspaper Repository in a mad rush, with my mother, my father, and my wife on the board of trustees. (They were the only people I felt I could ask to serve on such short notice.) The repository's purpose was, as a lawyer phrased it for the I.R.S., "to acquire, preserve, and make available to the public, original newspapers of historic and scholarly interest that would otherwise be destroyed or dispersed into private ownership." Having faxed off letters of inquiry to the MacArthur Foundation, the Knight Foundation, and the Getty Foundation, I flew to London a week before the British Library's September 30, 1999, deadline for bids. About forty volumes were set out for inspection by potential purchasers, and I was given a tour of the shelves. I wasn't allowed to take pictures. I suddenly felt, turning the pages of a beautiful Chicago *Tribune* volume from 1909, as if I'd stumbled on a lost, jewel-encrusted city in the jungle, and that curio dealers were waiting for a sign to begin chiselling away at it.

Edmund King, the director of the Newspaper Library, gave me tea in his office. I described to him, at the point of tears, the historical importance of Joseph Pulitzer's *World*, and I asked if there was some way to persuade the library to call off its sale and keep the papers, or to act responsibly by transferring them to a nonprofit entity such as the one I'd just started. I explained how the vintage-newspaper market worked in the States, and I told him that there were almost no sets of these papers left. The decision to dispose of the foreign papers had been made by the board several years earlier, King said. "As things stand, because we have gone to dealers, perhaps the best thing to do is to act as if you are a dealer, and place a bid for the runs."

A few days later, on a Saturday, with the help of Nicolas Barker, the editor of *The Book Collector* and a former head of preservation at the British Library, I got in touch with Brian Lang, the library's director, on his cellular phone. (He was waiting in line at a supermarket when I first reached him.) I asked him to call off the sale. "I don't have an answer for you now," Lang said, but he seemed somewhat taken aback and willing to give the problem thought.

Heartened, I got back to the States and faxed Lang a long followup letter that I thought would clinch it. "The very best thing for these papers would be for the Newspaper Library to reshelve them carefully, tightly control their use, and keep them safe," I wrote. I acknowledged the library's space difficulties—but perhaps there was a way to turn that problem around, I suggested, and use the present disposal emergency to inspire a major donor to endow a new rare-newspaper storage facility in Colindale. If the library's decision to dispose of the listed papers was firm, then I hoped it would consider donating the papers to the American Newspaper Repository. I listed the members of the repository's advisory board, thinking that some impressive names might help sway him. (Two of the advisers, who have since become trustees, are William Hart, the chairman of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and Thomas Tanselle, a vice-president of the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, who is a bibliographical scholar and the author of several strongly worded essays against microfilm-and-dump programs in research libraries.) I closed the letter by asking Lang again to suspend the September 30th sale, and to "take steps to ensure that this great surviving collection is kept intact for future scholarship."

Lang got the letter, c.c.'d to Edmund King, on Monday afternoon; Thursday was the deadline for bids. I heard nothing on Tuesday, and on Wednesday morning I started to get nervous. I called Lang's office, and then I faxed a letter to King requesting "that no irrevocable sales or other dispersals of any of the foreign newspapers listed take place at least until I have gotten a response to my letter to Brian Lang." At 5:30 P.M. British time, on the eve of the deadline, Mike Crump, the director of Reader Services and Collection Development at the library, E-mailed me. Brian Lang was in Estonia, he wrote. "We believe that at this stage we cannot stop the sale of material to dealers who have been examining it in good faith."

There was also the good faith of international (and intergenerational) scholarship to consider, but no matter. By then, it was too late to lodge protests with upper-level luminaries. The only thing to do, I realized, if I wanted to save at least some of the papers was, as Edmund King had suggested, to bid on them myself, on behalf of the American Newspaper Repository. At one-thirty in the morning on September 30, 1999, I faxed in more than fifty thousand dollars' worth of blind bids, distributing the money unequally over every lot that was for sale. (I kept it to around fifty thousand dollars because that's how much my wife and I figured we would clear if we liquidated one retirement account and payed taxes and early-withdrawal penalties. If no grant money came though, we planned to buy the papers with that money, and then pay for the shipping and storage of the collection by cashing out our other retirement account.) I bid £9,200 (about fifteen thousand dollars) for the *Herald Tribune* and the same amount for Pulitzer's *World;* £4,875 (about eight thousand dollars) for the Chicago *Tribune;* £300 apiece for the St. Louis *Globe Democrat*, the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, and the short run of Hearst's *American;* £2,875 for the New York *Times;* and £2,440 for the San Francisco *Chronicle.* And I bid three pounds each for a hundred or so other titles. I stressed that the bids didn't constitute a withdrawal of my plea that the British Library keep the collection or donate it as a whole to the repository, and I asked the library to keep in mind, in the event that my bids were below what others offered, that the repository was committed, as dealers were not, to keeping the volumes whole. A day later, on the advice of William Hart, I submitted a second bid—a global "preservation bid" equal to the sum of all outstanding high bids received by the deadline plus a thousand pounds.

Mike Crump acknowledged my first bid letter as received and then there was silence. I wrote to Prime Minister Tony Blair, and to Chris Smith, Britain's Heritage Secretary, and to John Ashworth, the British Library's chairman of the board, and again to Brian Lang. Thomas Tanselle wrote a letter urging the library to reverse its position. Nicolas Barker wrote to John Ashworth to say that the sale of the newspapers, under conditions of secrecy, would cause an "international scandal." Barker observed that "no good has ever come from previous dispersals from the Library." (The last significant dispersals came early in the nineteenth century, Barker said: "The gain was temporary and soon forgotten; the loss is permanent and irremediable.") Lucy Caswell introduced a resolution at the annual meeting of the American Journalism Historians Association entreating the British Library to act responsibly; it passed unanimously and was sent by the association's president to Brian Lang.

These efforts got nowhere. Alan Howarth, the Minister of Culture, Media, and Sport, wrote me that he was "assured that the procedures for disposal were rigorously followed in this case," and he added that he had "no power to intervene in the Library's decision." Two weeks after the sale deadline, the library sent out its official notification: everything on the list was going to the highest bidder; no allowances were made for nondestructive intent. (The "preservation bid" was disallowed, as coming after the deadline.) My offers prevailed in the case of the *World* and the *Herald Tribune*, and for ninety other titles, but failed in the case of the Chicago *Tribune*, the New York *Times*, the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*, the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, the San Francisco *Chronicle*, *Motion Picture Daily*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, and about thirty others. The library required payment by March 31, 2000, which was, thankfully, five months away and allowed time for fund-raising. Its invoice said, "Deselection (Newspapers) £19,282.00."

As it turned out, most or all of the titles I failed to get for the American Newspaper Repository went to Timothy Hughes, the dealer in Pennsylvania. I was especially unhappy about the Chicago *Tribune* (my great-grandfather was a Chicago newspaperman), and I called around to libraries in Chicago to see how serious a loss the destruction of that title would be. A helpful cataloguer at the Chicago Historical Society wrote, "I went through the online database that contains the holdings records of the U.S. Newspaper Program and found that no one has a good run of the *Trib* on paper. Many institutions have the full run on microfilm, but the hardcopy issues that exist are mostly scattered issues and short (under 5 year) runs."

Reading that, I found I couldn't tolerate the idea that the British Library's *Tribune* would be broken down. I asked Timothy Hughes to quote me a price. He wrote back that "its value to me is in selling the individual historic issues as well as the potential for birthday sales as I currently don't have any runs from the mid-West. Exploring its potential to me over the years I've decided that the very least I would have to sell the run for would be $63,000. Otherwise I will just keep the run as it would be more profitable to me in the long run." I told him he had a deal. The MacArthur Foundation came up with a grant of fifty thousand dollars, which covered much of the purchase price, and my mother and my mother-in-law made contributions, as did Viscountess Eccles, a scholar-collector of Boswell and Johnson who with her late husband endowed the British Library's David and Mary Eccles Centre for American Studies. Later, the Knight Foundation made a hundred-thousand-dollar grant.

Sixty-three thousand dollars, or about fifty dollars a volume, may seem like a lot of money to pay for old news, but it's actually a bargain. To buy the equivalent microfilm run from Bell & Howell would cost about a hundred and seventy-seven thousand dollars. We're at a bizarre moment in history, when you can have the real thing for considerably less than it would cost to buy a set of crummy black-and-white snapshots of it which you can't look at without the help of a machine.

The San Francisco *Chronicle's* fate also bothered me, so I got in touch with Gray Brechin, the author of "Imperial San Francisco," who uses old newspapers in his historical work; he and I made a case to the California State Library for buying the *Chronicle* directly from Timothy Hughes, which the library did (seventy years for sixty thousand dollars), with the help of the Wells Fargo Foundation. "We're trying to keep a library here that doesn't go goofy—that pays attention to the immemorial challenges and trusts of libraries," Kevin Starr, the State Librarian of California, told me.

And then there was the New York *Times* from 1915 to 1958. At first, Hughes was hesitant to sell it as a whole ("It sort of defeats my purpose," he said), but eventually we were able to agree on a price of fifty-six thousand dollars, which is, at a guess, five times as much as he paid for it, but still a fair price. With the money he's making, Hughes plans to buy an electric lift to speed the retrieval of volumes on high shelves, and he is thinking of building another warehouse.

In February, shortly after Hughes's lots, amounting to approximately sixty-four hundred volumes, arrived at his warehouse from England—each volume dutifully stamped "Discarded by the British Library"—I drove to Williamsport to make sure that the Chicago *Tribune* volumes were properly wrapped and labelled, and I handed Hughes a certified check. Sixteen pallets, ten tons of major metropolitan history, were forklifted onto a truck, which took them to New Hampshire, near where I live. On June 29th, forty-seven hundred or so more volumes arrived direct from the British Library, in two large Hyundai shipping containers. I cut the bands of a five-foot-high pallet and tore away some of the transatlantic shipper's black plastic: there were the words "The World" repeated over and over on the stack of spines. Pulitzer's originals were safe. What I have to do now is buy shelves and put the collection in order.

Maybe someday a research library will want to take responsibility for these things, or maybe not—whatever happens, at least they aren't going to be cut up and sold as birthday presents. Sometimes I'm a little stunned to think that I've become a newspaper librarian, more or less, and have the job of watching over this majestic, pulp-begotten ancestral stockpile. And of course I worry about running out of money, and about devoting months and years of my life, and my wife's life, to this effort. But at the moment nobody else seems to want to do what must be done. Six thousand square feet of space in a nineteenth-century brick mill building in Rollinsford, New Hampshire, with room to shelve all the papers and to hold a small reading room, costs about twenty-six thousand dollars a year to rent—about the salary of one microfilm technician. That seems cheap to preserve more than a century's worth of inherent vice, and virtue. ♦

"I say it's genetically altered, and I say the hell with it."

FICTION

THE STORY OF MATS ISRAELSON

BY JULIAN BARNES

In front of the church, which contained a carved altar brought from Germany during the Thirty Years' War, there stood a row of six horse stalls. Made from white fir cut and seasoned within a kilometre of the town's crossroads, they were undecorated, even unnumbered. Yet their simplicity and apparent availability were deceptive. In the heads of those who rode to church, and also of those who walked, the stalls were reserved for the six most important men in the neighborhood. A stranger who imagined he had the right to tie up his horse while enjoying the Brännvinsbord at the Centralhotellet would emerge to find his beast wandering down by the jetty, gazing out at the lake.

Ownership of each individual stall was a matter of private election, either by deed of gift or by last will and testament. But, whereas inside the church certain pews were reserved for certain families, from generation to generation, regardless of merit, outside, considerations of civic worth applied. A father might wish to hand on his stall to his eldest son, but if the boy did not show enough seriousness the gift would reflect upon the father. When Halvar Berggren succumbed to aquavit, frivolity, and atheism, and transferred ownership of the third stall to an itinerant knife grinder, it was on Berggren, not the knife grinder, that disapproval fell, and a more suitable appointment was made in exchange for a few *riksdaler*.

There was no surprise when Anders Bodén was appointed to the fourth stall by his father-in-law. The general manager of the sawmill was noted for his industry, lack of frivolity, and devotion to his family. If he was not unduly devout, he was charitable. One autumn when the shooting was good, he had filled one of the saw pits with scrap timber, laid a metal grid across the top, and cooked a deer, whose meat he distributed among his workmen. Though not born in the town, he took it upon himself to show others its sights; visitors would find themselves, at his insistence, climbing the *klockstapel* beside the church. Leaning one arm against the bell block, Anders would point out the brickworks; beyond it, the deaf-and-dumb asylum; and, just out of sight, the statue marking the spot where Gustavus Vasa had addressed the Dalecarlians in 1520. A hefty, bearded, and enthusiastic man, he would even offer to walk the visitors to the Hökberg, to view the stone recently placed there in memory of the jurist Johannes Stiernbock.

Gossip said that Anders Bodén spent so long with visitors to the town because this delayed his return home; gossip repeated that the first time he asked Gertrud to marry him she had laughed in his beard, and that she had begun to see his virtues only after her own disappointment in love with the Markelius boy; gossip speculated that, when Gertrud's father had come to the sawmill manager and suggested that he renew his wooing, the negotiations had not been simple. Anders had previously been made to feel impertinent in approaching a woman as talented and artistic as Gertrud—who, after all, had once played piano duets with Sjögren. But the marriage had prospered, as far as gossip could tell, even if she was known to call him a bore on public occasions. There were two children, and the specialist who delivered the second had advised Mrs. Bodén against further pregnancy.

When the pharmacist Axel Lindwall and his wife, Barbro, came to town, Anders Bodén took them up to the *klockstapel* and offered to walk them to the Hökberg. On his return home, Gertrud asked him why he was not wearing the club button of the Swedish Tourists' Union.

"Because I am not a member," he replied.

"They ought to make you an honorary one," she said.

Anders had learned to deal with his wife's sarcasm by means of pedantry, by answering her questions as if they meant no more than the words they contained. This tended to annoy her further, but for him it was a necessary protection.

"They seem like a nice couple," he said, matter-of-factly.

"You like everybody."

"No, my love, I do not think that that is true." He meant, for instance, that at the present moment he did not like her.

"You are more discriminating about logs than about members of the human race."

"Logs, my love, are very different from one another."

The arrival of the Lindwalls in the town caused no special interest. Those who sought Axel Lindwall's professional advice found all they could hope for in a pharmacist: someone slow and serious, who flatteringly regarded all complaints as life-threatening while, at the same time, judging them curable. He was a short, flaxen-haired man; gossip wagered that he would run to fat. Mrs. Lindwall was less remarked upon, being neither menacingly pretty nor contemptibly plain, neither vulgar nor *soignée* in dress, neither pushy nor reclusive in manner. She was just a new wife, and therefore one who should wait her turn. As incomers, the Lindwalls kept to themselves, which was proper, while attending church, which was also proper. Gossip said that when Axel first handed Barbro into the rowboat they acquired during their first summer, she had asked him, anxiously, "You are sure, Axel, that there are no sharks in the lake?" But gossip, in its honesty, could not be certain that Mrs. Lindwall had not been making a joke.

Once a fortnight, on a Tuesday, Anders Bodén would take the steamboat up the lake to inspect the seasoning sheds. He was standing at the rail by the first-class cabin when he became aware of a presence beside him.

"Mrs. Lindwall." As he spoke, his wife's words came into his head: "She's got less chin on her than a squirrel." Embarrassed, he looked across at the shoreline and said, "That's the brickworks."

"Yes."

A moment later: "And the deaf-and-dumb asylum."

"Yes."

"Of course." He realized that he had already pointed them out to her from the *klockstapel*.

She was wearing a straw boater with a blue ribbon.

Two weeks later, she was on the steamer again. She had a sister who lived just beyond Rättvik. He tried to make himself interesting to her. He asked whether she and her husband had yet visited the cellar where Gustavus Vasa had been concealed from his Danish pursuers. He explained about the forest, the way its colors and textures changed with the seasons, and how, where someone else would merely see a mass of trees, he could tell, even from the boat, the manner in which they were being worked. She followed his pointing arm politely; it was perhaps true that in profile her chin was just a little underhung and the tip of her nose strangely mobile. He realized that he had never developed a way of talking to women, and that up to now it had never bothered him.

"I'm sorry," he said. "My wife maintains that I should be wearing the club button of the Swedish Tourists' Union."

"I like a man to tell me what he knows," replied Mrs. Lindwall.

Her words confused him. Were they a criticism of Gertrud, an encouragement to him, or a mere statement of fact?

At supper that evening, his wife said, "What do you talk to Mrs. Lindwall about?"

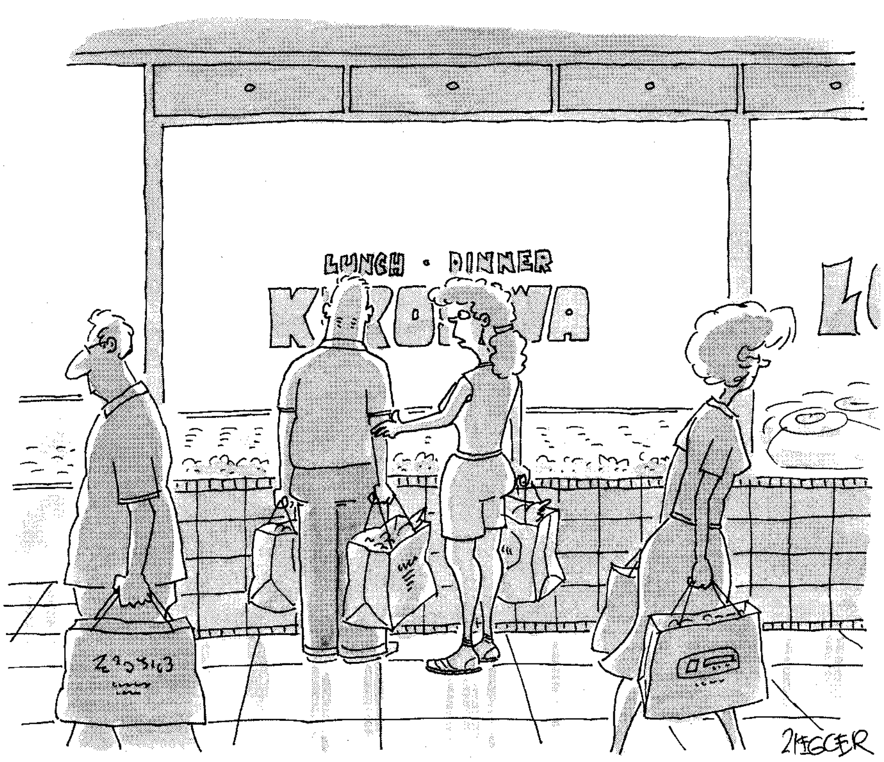
He did not know what to reply or, rather, how to reply. But, as usual, he took refuge in the simplest meaning of the words and pretended no surprise at the question. "The forest. I was explaining about the forest."

"And was she interested? In the forest, I mean."

"She grew up in the city. She had not seen so many trees until she came to this region."

"Well," said Gertrud, "there are an

THOMAS BLEHR, JR., "FRA PIPERVIKEN" [1901] ©NORSK MUSEUM FOR FOTOGRAFI-PREUS FOTOMUSEUM



"One of us has to draw the line somewhere, and I draw the line at mall sushi."

awful lot of trees in a forest, aren't there, Anders?"

He wanted to say, "She was more interested in the forest than you have ever been." He wanted to say, "You are unkind about her looks." He wanted to say, "Who saw me talking to her?" He said none of this.

Over the next fortnight, he found himself reflecting that Barbro was a name with a lovely weight to it, and softer-sounding than other names. He thought also that a blue ribbon around a straw hat made his heart cheerful. On Tuesday morning, as he was leaving, Gertrud said, "Give my regards to little Mrs. Lindwall."

He suddenly wanted to say, "And what if I fall in love with her?" Instead, he replied, "I shall if I see her."

On the steamer that day, he barely managed the usual slow civilities. Before they had even cast off, he began telling her what he knew. About timber, how it is grown, transported, hewn. He explained about bastard sawing and quarter sawing. He explained about the three parts of the trunk: pith, heartwood, and sapwood. In trees that have arrived at maturity, the heartwood occupies the largest proportion, and the sapwood is firm and elastic. "A tree is like a man," he said. "It takes threescore years and ten to arrive at maturity and is useless after a hundred."

He told her how once, at Bergeforsen, where an iron bridge spans the rapids, he had watched four hundred men at work, catching logs as they emerged from the river, and arranging them in the *sorteringsbommar* according to the distinctive marks of their owners. He explained to her, like a man of the world, the different systems of marking. Swedish timber is stencilled in red letters, with inferior wood marked in blue. Norwegian timber is stencilled in blue at both ends with the shipper's initials. Prussian timber is inscribed on the sides near the middle. Russian timber is dry-stamped or hammer-marked on the ends. Canadian timber is stencilled in black and white. American timber is marked with red chalk on the sides.

"Have you seen all this?" she asked. He admitted that he had not yet examined North American timber; he had only read about it.

"So every man knows his own log?"

"Of course. Otherwise a man might steal another man's log." He could not tell if she was laughing at him—indeed, at the whole world of men.

Suddenly, there was a flash from the shoreline. She looked away from it, then back at him, and the singularities of her profile were brought into harmony: her little chin pushed her lips into prominence, the tip of her nose, her open, gray-blue eyes. . . . It was beyond description, beyond even admiration.

"There is a belvedere," he said. "Probably someone with a spyglass. We are under . . . surveillance." But he lost confidence as he pronounced the last word. It sounded like something another man might say.

"Why?"

He did not know what to reply. He looked away to the shoreline, where the belvedere flashed again. Embarrassed, he told her the story of Mats Israelson, but he told it in the wrong order, and too quickly, and she did not appear interested. She did not even seem to realize that it was true.

"I'm sorry," she said, as if aware of his disappointment. "I have little imagination. I am interested only in what really happens. Legends seem . . . silly to me. We have too many of them in our country. Axel scolds me for having this opinion. He says that I am not showing honor to my country. He says that people will take me for a modern woman. But it is not that, either. It is that I have little imagination."

Anders found this sudden speech calming. It was as if she were giving him guidance. Still looking across at the shore, he told her about a visit he had once made to the copper mine at Falun. He told her only the things that had really happened. He told her that it was the greatest copper mine in the world, after those of Lake Superior; that it had been worked since the thirteenth century; that the entrances were close to a vast subsidence in the ground, known as Stöten, which had occurred at the end of the seventeenth century; that the deepest shaft was thirteen hundred feet; that the annual yield was about four hundred tons of copper, in addition to small amounts of silver and gold; that it cost two *riksdaler* for admission; that gunshots were extra.

"Gunshots are extra?"

"Yes."

"What are the gunshots for?"

"To awaken the echoes."

He told her that visitors usually telephoned ahead to announce their arrival; that they were given miner's attire and accompanied by a miner; that on the descent the steps were lit by torches; that it cost two *riksdaler*. He had told her that already. Her eyebrows, he noticed, were strongly marked, and darker than the hair on her head.

She said, "I would like to visit Falun."

That evening, he could tell that Gertrud was in a temper. Eventually, she said, "A wife has a right to a husband's discretion when he arranges a rendezvous with his mistress." Each noun rang like a dead clunk from the *klockstapel*.

He merely looked at her. She continued, "At least I should be grateful for your naïveté. Other men would wait until the steamer was out of sight of the jetty before starting their canoodling."

"You are deluded," he said.

"If my father were less of a businessman," she replied, "he would shoot you."

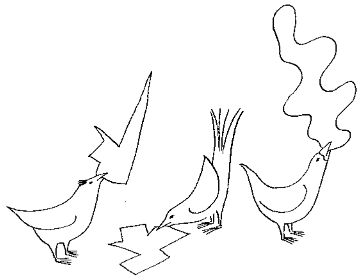
"Then your father should be grateful that the husband of Mrs. Alfredsson who runs the *konditori* behind the church in Rättvik is also just such a businessman." It was too long a sentence, he felt, but it did its work.

That night, Anders Bodén lined up all the insults he had received from his wife and stacked them as neat as any woodpile. If this is what she is capable of believing, he thought, then this is what is capable of happening. Except that Anders Bodén did not want a mistress, he did not want some woman in a pastry shop to whom he could give presents and about whom he could boast in rooms where men smoked small cigars together. He thought, Of course, now I see: the fact is I have been in love with her since we first met on the steamboat. I would not have come to it so soon had Gertrud not helped me there. I never imagined her sarcasm had any use to it, but this time it did.

For the next two weeks, he did not allow himself to dream. He did not need to dream, because everything was now clear and real and decided. He went about his work and in free moments thought about how she had not attended to the story of Mats Israelson. She had assumed that it was a legend. He had told it badly, he knew. And so he began practicing, like a schoolboy learning a poem. He would tell it to her again, and this time she would know, simply from the way he told it, that it was true. It would not take very long. But it was important that he learn to narrate it just as he had narrated the visit to the mine.

"In 1719," he began, with some fear that the distant date might bore her, but also convinced that it gave the story authenticity. "In 1719," he began, standing on the dock waiting for the return steamer, "a body was discovered in the copper mine of Falun. The body," he continued, watching the shoreline, "was that of a young man, Mats Israelson, who had perished in the mines forty-nine years previously. The body," he explained to the gulls raucously inspecting the boat, "was in a state of perfect preservation. The reason for this," he explained in some detail to the belvedere, the deaf-and-dumb asylum, and the brickworks, "was that the fumes of the copper vitriol had inhibited decomposition. They knew that the body was that of Mats Israelson," he murmured to the dockhand on the jetty catching the thrown rope, "because it was identified by an aged crone who had once known him. Forty-nine years earlier," he concluded, this time under his breath, in hot sleeplessness as his wife growled gently beside him and a wind flapped the curtain, "forty-nine years earlier, when Mats Israelson disappeared, that old woman, then as young as he, had been his betrothed."

He remembered the way Mrs. Lindwall had been facing him, her hand on the rail so that her wedding ring was not concealed, and had said, simply, "I would like to visit Falun." He imagined other women saying to him, "I long for Stockholm." Or, "At nights, I dream of Venice." Those women would be challenging, dressed in city furs, and they would not be interested in any response other than cap-doffing awe. But she had said, "I would like to visit Falun," and the simplicity of it had made him unable to answer. He practiced saying, with equal simplicity, "I shall take you there."



He convinced himself that if he were to tell the story of Mats Israelson correctly it would make her say once more, "I would like to visit Falun." And then he would reply, "I shall take you there." And everything would be decided. He would tell it to her ten minutes after they had cast off, at what he already thought of as *their* place, by the rail outside the first-class cabin.

He ran through the story one final time as he reached the jetty. It was the first Tuesday in the month of June. You had to be precise about dates. Seventeen-nineteen, to begin with. Then the first Tuesday of June in this year of our Lord, 1898. The sky was bright, the lake was pure, the gulls were discreet, the forest on the hillside behind the town was full of trees that were as straight and honest as a man. She did not come.

Gossip noted that Mrs. Lindwall had not kept her rendezvous with Anders Bodén. Gossip suggested that there had been a quarrel. Gossip counter-suggested that they had decided on concealment. Gossip wondered whether a sawmill manager lucky enough to be married to a woman who owned a piano imported from Germany would really allow his eye to stray to the unexceptional wife of the pharmacist. Gossip replied that Anders Bodén had always been an oaf with sawdust in his hair, and that he was seeking out a woman of his own class, as oafs are wont to do. Gossip added that marital relations had not been resumed in the Bodén household since the birth of the second child. Gossip briefly wondered if gossip had invented the whole story, but gossip decided that the worst interpretation of events was usually the safest and, in the end, the truest.

Gossip ceased, or at least diminished, when it was discovered that the reason Mrs. Lindwall had not gone to visit her sister was that she was pregnant with the Lindwalls' first child. Gossip thought this a fortuitous rescue of Barbro Lindwall's endangered reputation.

And that was that, thought Anders Bodén. A door opens, and then closes before you have time to walk through it. A man has as much control over his destiny as a log stencilled with red letters that is thrust back into the torrent by men armed with spiked poles. Perhaps he was no more than they said he was: an oaf lucky enough to have married a woman who had once played duets with Sjögren. But if so, and if his life from now on would never change, then, he realized, neither would he. He would remain frozen, preserved, at this moment—no, at the moment that had nearly happened, that could have happened, last week. There was nothing in the world, nothing that wife, or church, or society could do, to prevent him from deciding that his heart would never move again.

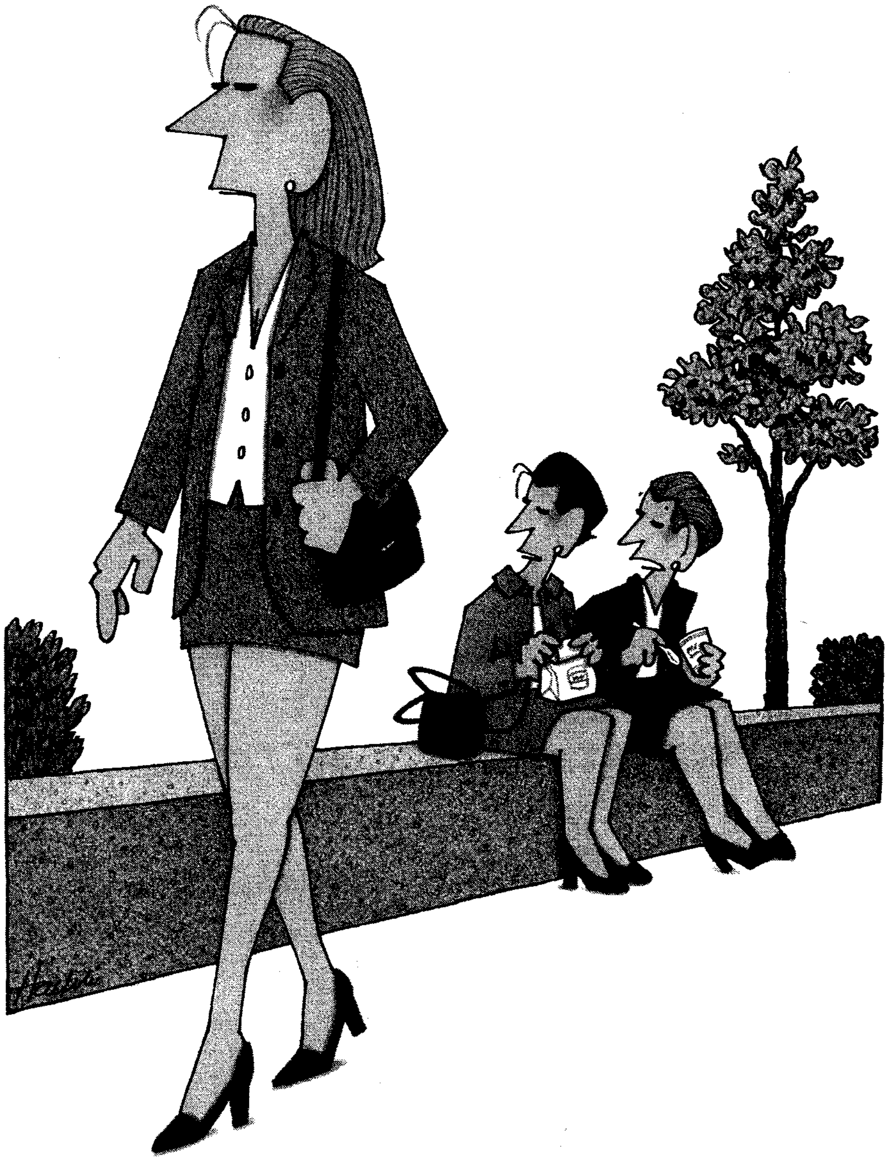
Barbro Lindwall was not convinced of her feelings for Anders Bodén until she recognized that she would now spend the rest of her life with her husband. First, there was little Ulf and then, a year later, Karin. Axel doted on the children, and so did she. Perhaps that would be enough. Her sister moved to the far north, where cloudberries grew, and sent pots of yellow jam each season. In the summer, she and Axel went boating on the lake. He put on predictable weight. The children grew. One spring, a laborer from the sawmill swam in front of the steamboat and was run down, the water stained as if he had been taken by a shark. A passenger on the foredeck testified that the man had swum steadily until the last moment. Gossip claimed that the victim's wife had been seen going into the forest with one of his workmates. Gossip added that he was drunk and had taken a bet that he could swim right across the steamer's bow. The coroner decided that he must have been deafened by the water in his ears and recorded a verdict of misadventure.

We are just horses in our stalls, Barbro would say to herself. The stalls are unnumbered, but even so we know our places. There is no other life. . . . But if only he could have read my heart before I did. I do not talk to men like that, listen to them like that, look them in the face like that. Why couldn't he tell?

The first time she had seen him again, each of them part of a couple strolling by the lake after church, she was relieved that she was pregnant because ten minutes later she had a bout of sickness, the cause of which would otherwise have been obvious. All she could think of, as she vomited into the grass, was that the fingers holding her head belonged to the wrong man.

She never saw Anders Bodén alone; she made sure of that. Once, seeing him board the steamboat ahead of her, she turned back at the jetty. In church, she sometimes glimpsed the back of his head, and imagined that she could hear his voice separately. When she went out, she protected herself with the presence of Axel; at home, she kept the children close. Once, Axel suggested that they invite the Bodéns to coffee; she replied that Mrs. Bodén would certainly expect Madeira and sponge cake and that, even if both were provided, she would look down her nose at a mere pharmacist and his wife who were incomers. The suggestion was not repeated.

She did not know how to think about what had happened. There was no one to ask: she thought of similar examples, but they were all disreputable and seemed to have no bearing on her own case. She was unprepared for the constant, silent, secret pain. One year, when her sister's cloudberry jam arrived, she looked at the pot, at the glass, at the metal lid, the circle of muslin, the handwritten label, the date—the date!—



"If only legginess were based on circumference."

and at the yellow jam inside, and she thought, That is what I have done to my heart. Then, each year, when pots arrived from the north, she thought the same thing.

At first, Anders continued to tell her what he knew, under his breath. Sometimes he was a tour guide, sometimes a sawmill manager. He told her, for instance, about defects in timber. "Cup shake" is a natural splitting in the interior of the tree between two of the annular rings. "Star shake" occurs when there are fissures radiating in several directions. "Heart shake" is often found in old trees and extends from the pith or heart of the tree toward its circumference.

In subsequent years, when Gertrud scolded, when the aquavit took hold, when polite eyes told him that he had indeed become a bore, when the lake froze at its edges and the skating race to Rättvik could be held, when his daughter emerged from church a married woman and he saw in her eyes more hope than he had known existed, when the long nights began and his heart seemed to close down in hibernation, when his horse stopped suddenly and began to tremble at what it sensed but could not see, when the old steamboat was dry-docked one winter and repainted in fresh colors, when friends from Trondheim asked him to show them the copper mine at Falun and he agreed and then, an hour before departure, found himself in the bathroom forcing his fingers into his throat to make the vomit come, when the steamer took him past the deaf-and-dumb asylum, when things in the town changed, when things in the town remained the same year after year, when the gulls left their stations by the jetty to scream inside his skull instead, when his left forefinger had to be amputated at the second joint after he had idly pulled at a stack of timber in one of the seasoning sheds—on these occasions, and many more, he thought of Mats Israelson. And as the years passed Mats Israelson turned, in his mind, from a set of clear facts that could be presented as a lover's gift into something vaguer but more powerful. Into a legend, perhaps—a thing she would not have been interested in.

She had said, "I would like to visit Falun," and all he had needed to reply was "I shall take you there." Perhaps if she had indeed said, flirtatiously, like one of those imagined women, "I long for Stockholm," or, "At nights, I dream of Venice," he would have thrown his life at her, bought rail tickets the next morning, caused a scandal, and months later come home drunk and pleading. But that was not how he was, because that was not how she was. "I would like to visit Falun" had been a much more dangerous remark than "At nights, I dream of Venice."

As the years passed, and her children grew, Barbro Lindwall was sometimes assailed by a terrible apprehension: that her daughter would marry the Bodén boy. That, she thought, would be the worst punishment in the world. But, in the event, Karin attached herself to Bo Wicander and could not be teased out of it. Soon, all the Bodén and the Lindwall children were married. Axel became a fat man who wheezed in his pharmacy and secretly feared he might poison someone by mistake. Gertrud Bodén went gray, and a seizure left her unable to play the piano with her right hand. Barbro herself first plucked assiduously, then dyed; that she had kept her shape with little assistance from corsetry seemed to her a mockery.

"You have a letter," said Axel. His manner was neutral. He passed it over. The handwriting was unfamiliar. The postmark was Falun.

> Dear Mrs. Lindwall,
> I am in the hospital here. There is a matter I would very much like to discuss with you. Would it be possible for you to visit me one Wednesday?
> Yours truly,
> Anders Bodén

She handed over the letter and watched Axel read it.

"Well?" he said.

"I should like to visit Falun."

"Of course." He meant: Of course you would—gossip always called you his mistress. I was never sure, but of course I should have guessed, that is what your sudden cooling and all those years of absent-mindedness were about. Of course, of course. But she heard only: Of course you must.

"Thank you," she said. "I shall take

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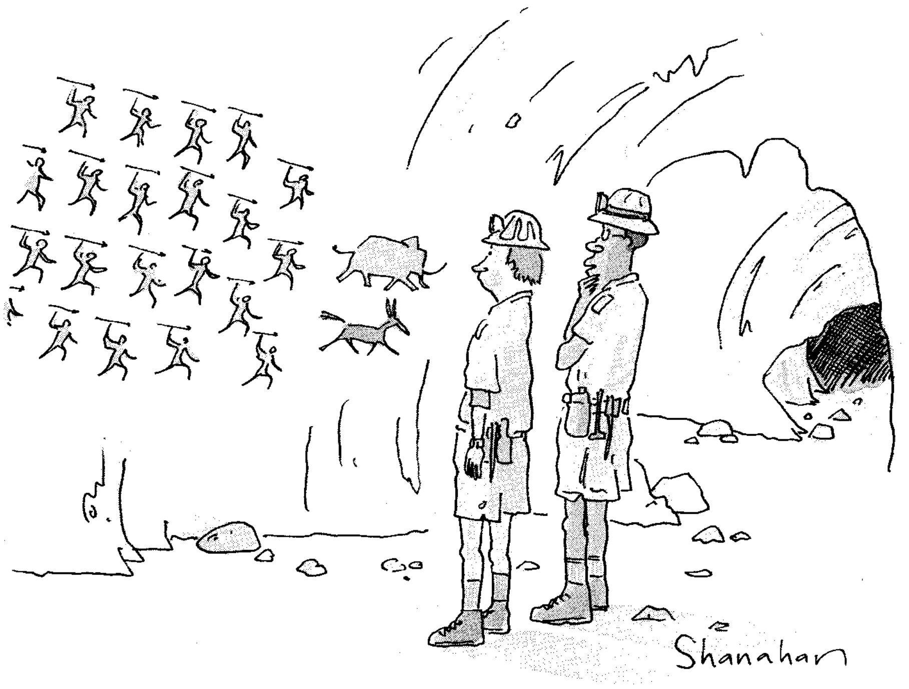


"I think it was an election year."

• •

the train. It may be necessary to stay overnight."

"Of course."

Anders Bodén lay in bed deciding what to say. At last, after all these years—twenty, twenty-five?—they had finally seen each other's handwriting. This exchange, this first new glimpse of each other, was as intimate as any kiss. Her writing was small, neat, school-formed; it showed no signs of age. He thought, briefly, of all the letters he might have received from her.

At first he imagined that he might simply tell her the story of Mats Israelson again, in the version that he had perfected. Then she would know, and understand. Or would she? Just because the story had been with him every day for two decades did not mean that she would necessarily have any memory of it. So she might judge it a trick, or a game, and things might go wrong.

But it was important not to tell her that he was dying. This would put an unjust burden on her. Worse, sympathy might make her change her reply. He, too, wanted the truth, not a legend. He told the nursing staff that a dear cousin was coming to visit him, but because of a fragility of the heart must on no account be told of his condition. He asked them to trim his beard and comb his hair. When they had gone, he rubbed a little tooth powder into his gums and slid his damaged hand beneath the bedclothes.

At the time of the letter, it had seemed straightforward to her, or, if not straightforward, at least unarguable. For the first time in twenty-three years, he had asked something of her; therefore, her husband, to whom she had always remained faithful, must grant the request. He had done so, but from that point things began to lose their clarity. What should she wear for the journey? There seemed no clothes for such an occasion, which was neither a holiday nor a funeral. At the station, the booking clerk had repeated "Falun," and the station-master had eyed her valise. She felt entirely vulnerable—if someone were merely to prod her, she would start explaining her life, her purpose, her virtue. "I am going to meet a man who is dying," she would have said. "No doubt he has a last message for me." This must be the case, mustn't it—that he was dying? Otherwise, it did not make sense. Otherwise, he would have sought contact when the last of their children had left home, when she and Axel had become merely a couple again.

She registered at the Stadshotellet near the marketplace. Again, she felt the clerk examining her valise, her married status, her motives.

"I am visiting a friend in the hospital," she said, although no question had been asked of her.

In her room, she stared at the hooped-iron bedstead, the mattress, the brand-new wardrobe. She had never stayed in a hotel by herself before. This was where women came, she realized—certain women. She felt that gossip could see her now—alone in a room with a bed. It seemed astonishing that Axel had let her come. It seemed astonishing that Anders Bodén had summoned her without any explanation.

Her vulnerability began to disguise itself as irritation. What was she doing here? What was he making her do? She thought of books she had read, the sort Axel disapproved of. In books, scenes in hotel bedrooms were alluded to. In books, couples ran away together—but not when one of them was in the hospital. In books, there were heartwarming deathbed nuptials—but not when both parties were still married. So what was to happen? "There is a matter I would very much like to discuss with you." Discuss? She was a late-middle-aged woman bringing a pot of cloudberry jam to a man she had known a little, twenty-three years ago. Well, it was up to him to make sense of it all. He was the man, and she had done more than her part just by coming there. She had not remained a respectable married woman all these years merely by chance.

"You have lost weight," she told him.

"They say it suits me," he replied with a smile. "They": he obviously meant "my wife."

"Where is your wife?"

"She visits on other days." Which would be apparent to the hospital staff. Oh, his wife visits him on these days, and "she" visits him when his wife's back is turned.

"I thought you were very ill."

"No, no," he replied cheerfully. She seemed very much on edge—yes, it had to be said, a little like a squirrel, with anxious, jumping eyes. Well, he must calm her, soothe her. "I'm fine. I'll be fine."

"I thought . . . " She paused. No,

things must be clear between them. "I thought you were dying."

"I'll last as long as any fir tree on the Hökberg."

He sat there grinning. His beard had been freshly trimmed, his hair stylishly combed; he wasn't dying, after all, and his wife was in another town. Mrs. Lindwall waited.

"That is the roof of the Kristina-Kyrka."

She turned away, walked to the window, and looked across at the church. When Ulf was little, she remembered, she had always had to turn her back before he would tell her a secret. Perhaps this was what Anders Bodén needed. So she looked at the copper roof blazing in the sun and waited. After all, he was the man.

Her silence and her turned back alarmed him. This was not what he had planned. He had not even managed to call her Barbro, casually, as if from long ago. What had she said back then? "I like a man to tell me what he knows."

"The church was built in the middle of the nineteenth century," he began. "I am not sure exactly when." She did not respond. "The roof is made from copper extracted from the local mine." Still no response. "But I do not know if the roof was constructed at the same time as the church, or if it was a later addition. I intend to find out," he added, trying to sound purposeful. Still she did not reply. The only voice he heard was Gertrud's, whispering, "The club button of the Swedish Tourists' Union."

Barbro's anger was now with herself as well. Of course she had never known him, never known what he was really like. She had merely indulged a stupid fantasy all these years.

"You are not dying?"

"I'll last as long as any fir tree on the Hökberg," he repeated.

"So you are fit enough to come to my room at the Stadshotellet." She said it as harshly as she could, contemptuous of the whole world of men, with their cigars and mistresses and logs.

"Mrs. Lindwall . . . " All clarity of mind deserted him. He wanted to say that he loved her, that he had always loved her, that he thought of her most—no, all of the time. "I think of you most—no, all of the time" was what he had prepared to say. And then, "I have loved you from the moment I met you on the steamboat. You have sustained my life ever since."

But her irritation made him lose heart. She thought he was just a seducer. So the words he had prepared would seem like those of a seducer. And he did not know her after all. Nor did he know how to talk to women. It enraged him that there were men out there, smooth-tongued men who knew what best to say. Oh, get it over with, he thought suddenly, catching her irritation. You'll soon be dead anyway, so get it over with.

"I thought," he said, and his tone was rough, aggressive, like a man bargaining, "I thought, Mrs. Lindwall, that you loved me."

He saw her shoulders stiffen.

"Ah," she replied. The vanity of the man. What a false picture she had carried of him all these years, as a person of discretion, tact, of an almost blameworthy inability to put his case. In truth, he was just another man, behaving as men did in books, and she was just another woman for believing otherwise.

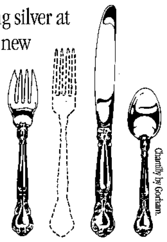
Still facing away, she answered him as if he were little Ulf with one of his childish secrets. "You were mistaken." Then she turned back to this abject, grinning dandy, this man who knew hotel rooms. "But thank you"—she wasn't good at sarcasm, and searched briefly for a subject—"thank you for pointing out to me the deaf-and-dumb asylum."

She thought about taking back the cloudberry jam, but judged it unseemly. There was still a train she could catch that evening. The idea of staying the night in Falun revolted her.

For a long time, Anders Bodén did not think. He watched as the copper roof took on a darker hue. He removed his damaged hand from beneath the bedclothes and used it to make his hair disorderly. He gave the pot of jam to the first nurse who came into the room.

One of the things he had learned in life, and which he hoped he could rely on, was that a greater pain drives out a lesser one. A strained muscle disappears before toothache, toothache disappears before a crushed finger. He hoped—it was his only hope now—that the pain of cancer, the pain of dying, would drive out the pains of love. It did not seem likely.

When the heart breaks, he thought, it splits like timber, down the full length of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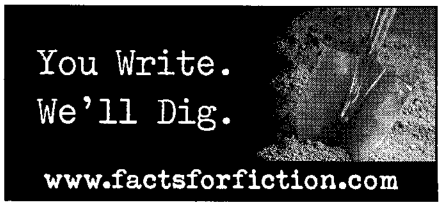
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the plank. In his first days at the sawmill he had seen Gustaf Olsson take a piece of solid timber, drive in a wedge, and give the wedge a little twist. The timber broke down the grain, from end to end. That was all you needed to know about the heart: where the grain lay. Then, with a twist, with a gesture, with a word, you could destroy it.

As night fell and the train began to skirt the darkening lake on which it had all begun, her shame and self-reproach weakened, and she tried to think clearly. It was the only way to keep the pain at bay: to think clearly, to be interested only in what really happens, in what you know to be true. And she knew this: that the man for whom, at any single moment of the last twenty-three years, she would have left husband and children, for whom she would have lost her reputation and her place in society, with whom she would have run away to God knows where, was not, and never would have been, worthy of her love. Axel, whom she respected, who was a good father and breadwinner, was much more worthy of it. And yet she did not love him, not if what she had felt for Anders Bodén was the measure of things. This, then, was the desolation of her life, divided between not loving a man who deserved it and loving one who did not. What she had thought of as the mainstay of her life, a continuous companion of possibility, as faithful as a shadow or a reflection in water, was no more than that: a reflection, a shadow. Nothing real. Though she prided herself on having little imagination, and though she took no account of legends, she had allowed herself to spend half her life in a frivolous dream. All that could be said for her was that she had kept her virtue. And what sort of claim was that? If she had been tested, she would not have resisted for a moment.

When she thought about it in this way, in clarity and truth, her shame and self-reproach returned, all the more violently. She undid the button of her left sleeve and unwound from her wrist a length of faded blue ribbon. She let it drop to the floor of the carriage.

Axel Lindwall threw his cigarette into the empty grate when he heard the trap approaching. He took the valise from her, helped her down, and paid the driver.

"Axel," she said, in a tone of bright affection, once they were inside the house, "why do you always smoke when I am not here?"

He looked at her. He did not know what to do or say. He did not want to ask her questions in case that made her tell him lies—or in case that made her tell him the truth. He feared both equally. The silence continued. Well, he thought, we cannot live together in silence for the rest of our lives. So, eventually, he answered, "Because I like smoking."

She laughed a little. They were standing in front of the unlit grate; he still held her valise. For all he knew, it contained all the secrets, all the truths, and all the lies he did not want to hear.

"I returned sooner than I thought."

"Yes."

"I decided not to spend the night in Falun."

"Yes."

"The town smells of copper."

"Yes."

"But the roof of the Kristina-Kyrka blazes in the setting sun."

"So I have been told."

It was painful for him to watch his wife in such a state. It would only be humane to let her tell what lies she had prepared. So he allowed himself a question.

"And how is . . . he?"

"Oh, he is very well." She did not know how absurd this sounded until she had said it. "That is to say, he is in the hospital. He is very well, but I suspect that this cannot be the case."

"Generally speaking, people who are very well do not go to the hospital."

"No."

He regretted his sarcasm. A teacher had once told his class that sarcasm was a moral weakness. Why did he remember that now?

"And . . . ?"

She had not realized until now that she would have to account for her visit to Falun; not for its incidentals but for its purpose. She had imagined, when she left, that on her return everything would be quite changed, and that it would merely be necessary to explain this change, whatever it might be. As the silence prolonged itself, she panicked.

"He wishes you to have his stall. At church. It is the fourth stall."

"I know it is the fourth stall. Now go to bed."

"Axel," she said, "I was thinking on the train that we can become old. The sooner the better. I think things must be easier if you are old. Do you think that that is possible?"

"Go to bed."

Alone, he lit another cigarette. Her lie was so preposterous that it might even have been true. But it came to the same thing. If it was a lie, then the truth was that she had gone, more openly than ever before, to visit her lover. Her former lover? If it was the truth, it was a sarcastic payment from the jeering lover to the wronged husband. The sort of gift that gossip loved and never forgot.

Tomorrow, the rest of his life would start. And it would be changed, quite changed, by the knowledge of how much of his life until then had not been as he thought. Would he have any memories, any past, that would remain untainted by what had been confirmed tonight? Perhaps she was right, and they should try to be old together, and rely, over time, on the hardening of the heart.

"What was that?" asked the nurse. This one was starting to become incoherent. It was often the case in the final stages.

"The extra . . . "

"Yes?"

"The extra is for gunshots."

"Gunshots?"

"To awaken the echoes."

"Yes?"

His voice toiled as he repeated the sentence. "The extra is for gunshots to awaken the echoes."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Bodén. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Then I hope you never find out."

At the funeral of Anders Bodén, his coffin, made from white fir cut and seasoned within a kilometre of the town's crossroads, was placed in front of the carved altar brought from Germany during the Thirty Years' War. The vicar compared the sawmill manager to a tall tree that had fallen beneath God's axe. It was not the first time that the congregation had heard this comparison. Outside the church, the fourth stall remained empty in homage to the dead man. He had made no provision in his will, and his son had moved to Stockholm. After suitable consultation, the stall was awarded to the captain of the steamboat, a man conspicuous for his civic merit. ♦

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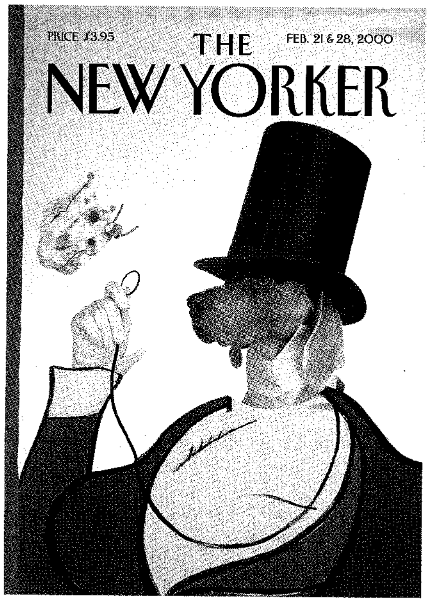

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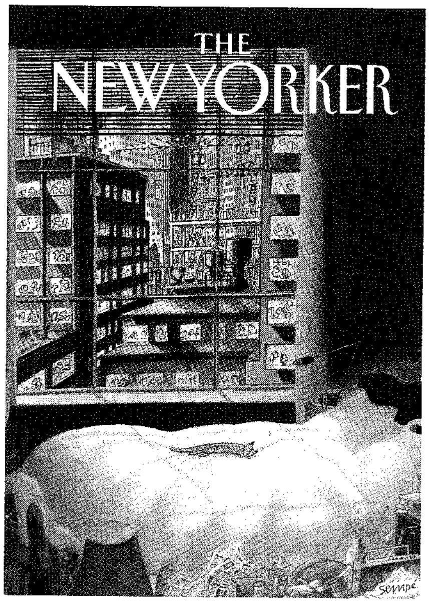

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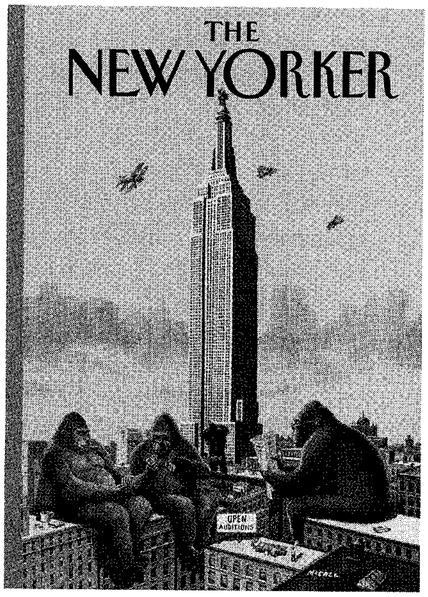

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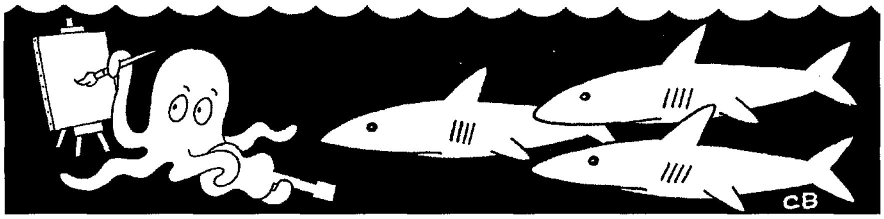


BOOKS

OPEN HOUSE

A new book pursues the erotics of real estate.

BY REBECCA MEAD

Fifteen years ago, in "Slaves of New York," Tama Janowitz depicted poverty-stricken artists in misaligned relationships that endured only because it was cheaper to share the rent; these days, however, the defining Manhattan real-estate narrative would be one in which a love affair founders because the participants are already married to their mortgages. To swear your heart away is one thing, but to relinquish the apartment that you bought before the market ballooned out of all proportion is the ultimate commitment. In "Sex and Real Estate: Why We Love Houses" (Pantheon; $23), Marjorie Garber is concerned less with the perennial problem of reconciling romance and realty than with a parallel subject: the extent to which your relationship with your house is itself erotic. Garber, an English professor at Harvard who has written extensively on Shakespeare, is also the author of a series of cultural-studies volumes, each of which has represented a bid for a progressively larger segment of the reading population. First, there was a book about cross-dressing ("Vested Interests"); next was one on bisexuality ("Vice Versa"), and then one on dogs ("Dog Love"). There are a lot of dog owners in America, but there are many more people who have homes, and Garber explains to them that their fondness for their houses is not due merely to the fact that they've got pleasing west-facing aspects or plentiful closet space. It seems that they are vulnerable to all kinds of subliminal cultural cues behind which sex is lurking, like the mildew on the bathroom grouting which can be kept at bay with disinfectant but is ready to overwhelm at the first instant of domestic negligence.

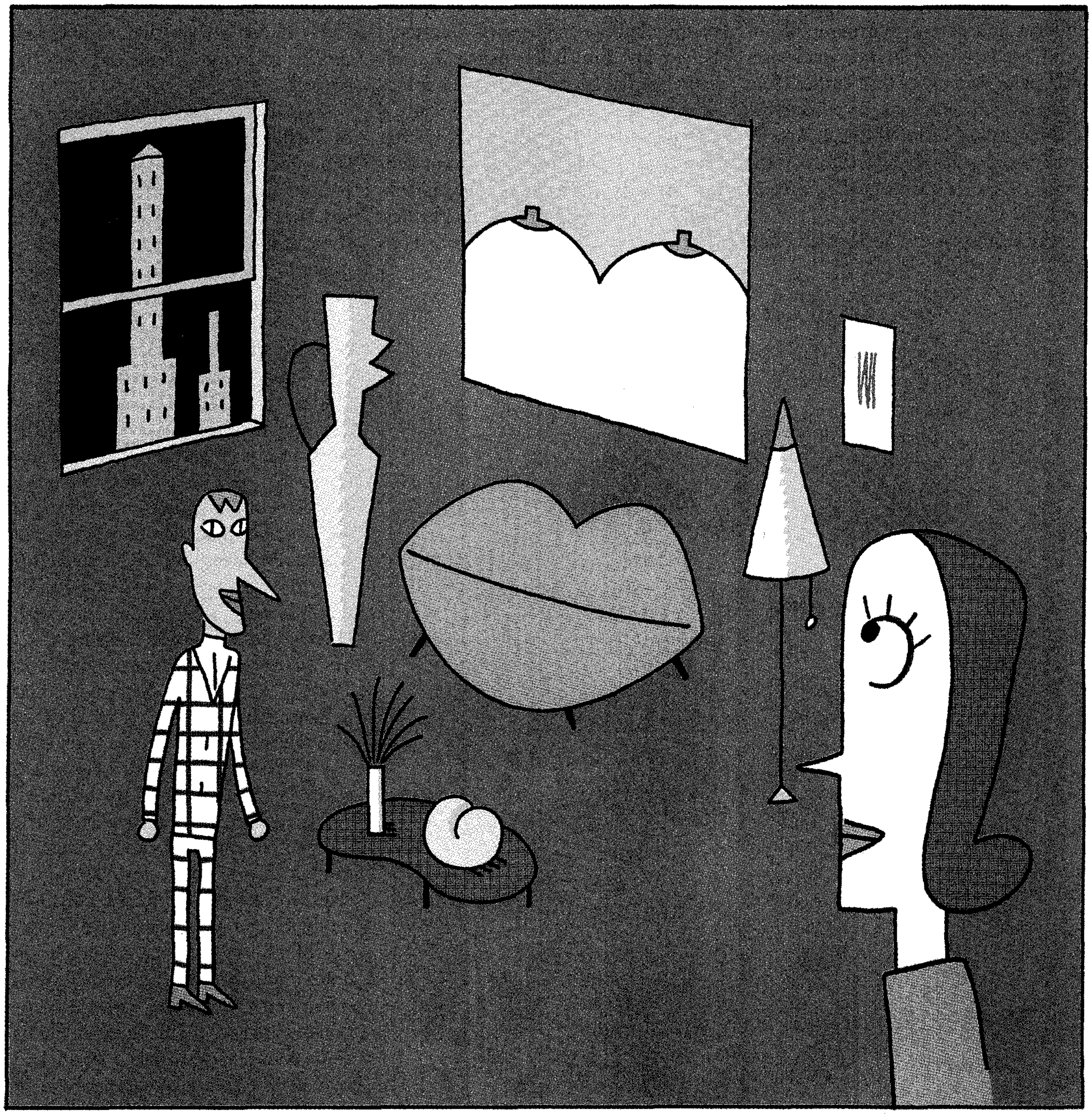
Garber's concern in this volume is what might be characterized as domestography: she looks at writing about the home—in literature, in advertising copy, and in newspaper columns. Drawing on publications such as an 1878 anthology entitled "Golden Thoughts on Mother, Home and Heaven," she argues that the nineteenth-century conflation of "mother" and "home" endures in the contemporary expectation that one's home should be safe and comforting, and should take care of one's basic needs, just like Mom. (Well, maybe not your mom, but then Garber says that she is dealing in fantasies of the maternal ideal, not the real thing.) Elsewhere, she writes of the home as the beloved, delineating a literary history of "house love" with the examples of Manderley, Brideshead, and Pemberley. (Elizabeth Bennet, Garber reminds us, makes the delightful observation that her love for Mr. Darcy "has been coming on so gradually that I hardly know when it began. But I believe I must date it from my first seeing his beautiful grounds at Pemberley.") Garber writes, too, of the "trophy house," citing the sale, in 1998, of a penthouse apartment in the Pierre Hotel for nearly twenty-five million dollars. ("I've seen it and it's worth it, if you're into that kind of thing," a broker told the New York *Observer* at the time.) And she discusses the house as an embodiment of history, usually a fantasized variation on the original, grubbier theme. Here Garber goes into considerable detail about her recent purchase of an 1898 house in Cambridge—presumably the inspiration for this volume—and her run-in with the Historical Commission over some controversial shutters that she wished to install. This is perhaps more than we need to know about her own domestic travails, since the number of Americans who live in designated historical districts is certainly smaller than the number of Americans who own dogs, and probably even smaller than the number of Americans who are bisexuals, let alone transvestites.

"Sex and Real Estate" is most engaging in the chapter in which Garber compares a home to the human body; she ranges from Edmund Spenser's House of Alma, in "The Faerie Queene," to an advertising campaign for Thomasville's Encounter Collection, which includes the Master Chest ("It's smart, attractive, and gives you all the space you need. Too bad you can't date it") and the Encounter Bed ("Finally, a bed that doesn't just lie there"). The history of architecture since Renaissance times, she says, has been "a history of consistent negotiation between public and private spaces, indoor and outdoor, secret and open, male and female." It's a cultural-studies cliché to point out the ways in which socially sanctioned limits are transgressed; but academic talk of the "liminal" is less annoying when the subject being discussed actually is the *limen*—"threshold," in Latin. Garber, surveying the work of various historians, writes about how notions of privacy have changed over the centuries, and she elaborates upon the sexual implications of the way in which the American house was traditionally divided between "front" rooms—those in which guests are received and appearances kept up—and "back" rooms, where the earthier business of the family is conducted. Inevitably, she says, such a layout provided the thrill of doing "back" things in the "front" rooms, such as groping one's lover in the parlor. A recent development, she

PHILIPPE PETIT-ROULET

notes, is to make rooms that were formerly "back" into "front"; kitchens, for example, are fitted out with granite countertops and handsome dining tables around which nonfamily members can comfortably gather. (Garber quotes Miss Manners's astute observation that the "entertainment now consists of letting the guests watch what used to be the preparations for entertaining guests.")

Garber, who is in her mid-fifties, is particularly interested in the domestic mores of the mid-century; she cites some thundering propaganda produced in 1947 by the Family Relations Institute, which laid the blame for divorce on the increasing popularity of twin beds. She rhapsodizes about the erotic possibilities of the single bed: "Think of having to cross that boundary line, deliberately, visibly getting out of one bed and into another. . . . Could it be that some Americans chose twin beds, not because they held sexuality at a distance, but because twin beds were *sexier*?" But her insistence that real estate is what fifty-year-olds have instead of hot sex is a little embarrassing. "How could anything—anything *else*? anything at *our* age?—stir such uncomfortable passions?" Garber writes, speaking of the "mingled lust and shame" that house hunters feel on finding a desired abode. Rather in the way that every generation of teen-agers acts as if it had discovered sex, Garber seems to think that only the middle-aged are old enough for real estate. But take a turn around Crate & Barrel or Pottery Barn, and you'll find plenty of twenty-five-year-olds discussing the

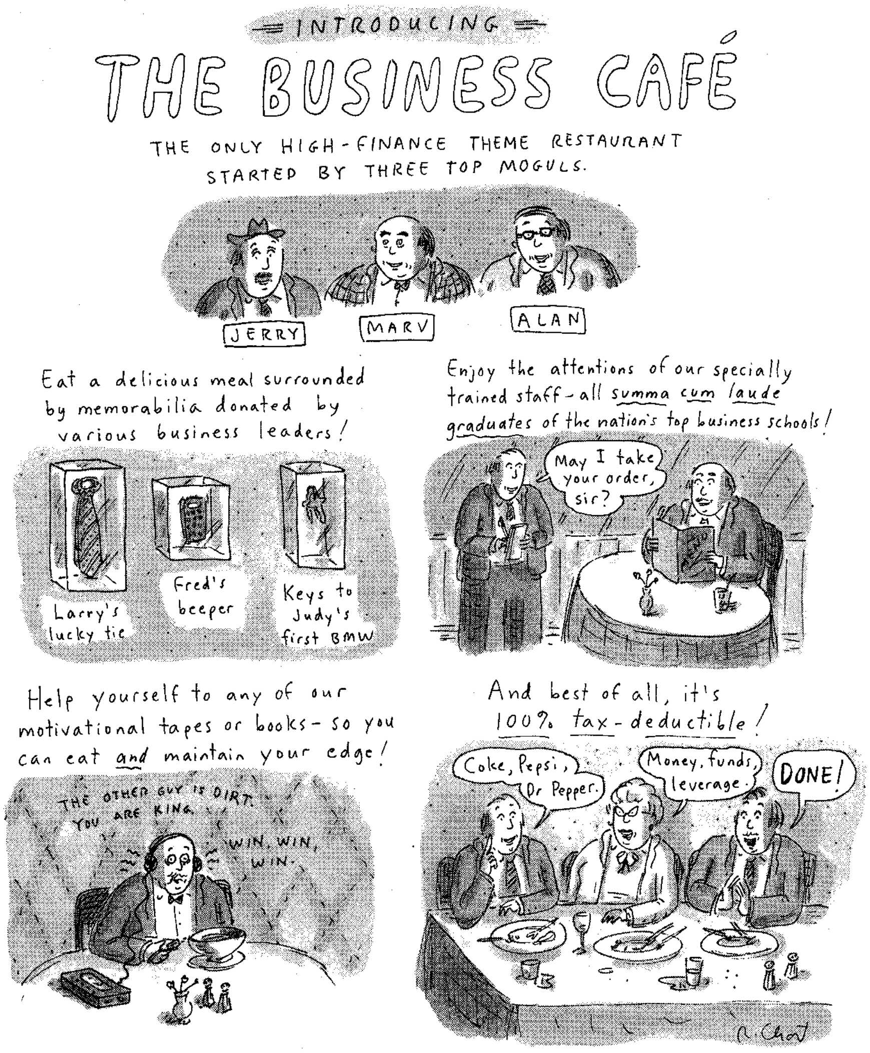


According to Marjorie Garber, houses, in our erotic imagination, figure less as machines for living than as bodies for loving.

merits of chenille cushion covers versus those of brushed cotton.

Is it even clear that "sex and real estate are such a hot couple today," as Garber asserts? The book goes wrong when it treats the images that appear in shelter magazines and the real-estate section of the newspaper as reliable guides to how Americans think about their homes. High-end publications of the sort Garber focusses on may, at best, point to the fantasies of only a small sliver of the population; there's an entirely different aesthetic to be found in lower-end magazines, like *Better Homes & Gardens*, the pages of which are filled with pictures of children and dogs disporting in rooms that have been inexpensively made over with paint stencils or dust ruffles. And Garber's winsome twirl of a book has nothing to say about all those Americans who can barely afford to pay the rent, let alone subscribe to *Martha Stewart Living*.

She seems captivated by the notion that shelter magazines sexualize the home. She writes of the way in which real-estate ads echo the language of singles advertisements ("Light & Lovely on West End Avenue" is an apartment; "Soul soothing, attractive, trim" is a would-be dating partner). She quotes the manifesto laid out by Dominique Browning, the editor of *House & Garden*, that her magazine "ought to be a place where the reader can indulge in a kind of design promiscuity, falling in love at the turn of a page with completely different kinds of rooms, not knowing whether the affair will last a day or a lifetime." But it's hardly surprising that the language of sex should be employed in shelter magazines, because sex has become the lingua franca of commerce. If Garber had wanted to buy a new car or to become a better cook, she would have found equivalent advertising copy in automobile publications and food-and-wine magazines. The July issue of *Car & Driver* contains an advertisement that characterizes the driving experience thus: "Your hands are sweating . . . Your pulse is racing . . . Your heart is pounding." The July/August issue of *Saveur* includes an advertisement for a Cuisinart that reads, "In pursuit of passion in the kitchen—seeks same for long-term relationship. Big mouth and capacity to make lots of dough a plus. Must be low maintenance, yet have sense of style. Looking for versatile companion, accessible morning, noon and night." You could conclude, if you were so inclined, that Americans are engaged in a romance with their kitchen appliances. But more likely it just shows that copywriters remain convinced of the old saw that sex sells.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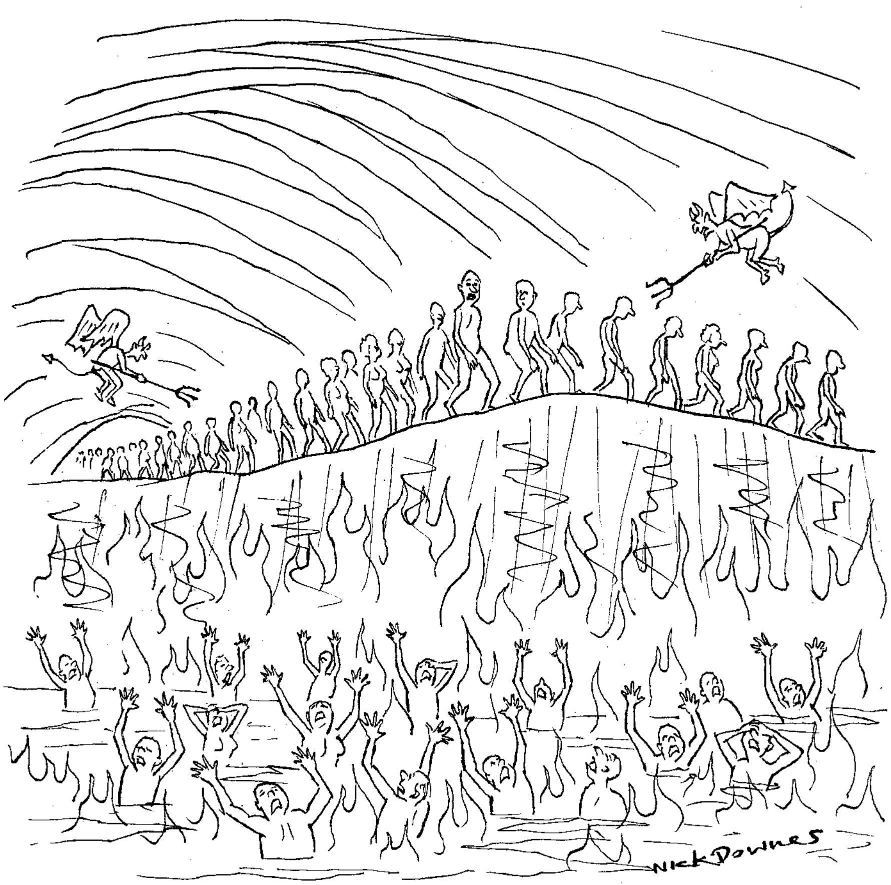
R. Chast

Garber has a theory that the erotics of shelter magazines require them to show rooms devoid of real-life occupants—"It means they're waiting for *you*." But the result is that she skips over some of the more interesting new specimens of the genre, such as the magazines *Wallpaper* and *Nest*. *Wallpaper*, which depicts staged, high-design interiors occupied by impossibly languid and stylish models, is targeted to the kind of people who ten or fifteen years ago read the ardently superficial British magazine *The Face* for their introduction to fashion. When *Wallpaper* appeared, in 1996, it was strikingly original, though since then its look—Jean-Michel Frank furniture, Bauhaus architecture—has become somewhat dully omnipresent, found in would-be stylish hotel lobbies worldwide. *Nest*, an interiors quarterly that made its début in 1997, is a curiosity shop of peculiar habitats, and the last place you'd go for ideas about sprucing up the spare bedroom. The current issue includes a piece about a wax museum's reconstruction of van Gogh's Arles bedroom; an article showing the domestic circumstances of migrant farmworkers in Washington state who inhabit bunk-bed-filled formerly refrigerated train cars; and a series of photographs of a Manhattan hotel room that has been transformed into a Garden of Eden with the addition of extensive plastic flora and fauna and a young, sweetly naked Adam and Eve. Both *Nest* and *Wallpaper* have an identifiably but not exclusively gay sensibility; and the intersection of homosexuality and interior decoration—which is never discussed explicitly in mainstream shelter publications—goes unacknowledged by Garber, quite unaccountably, given the subject matter of her previous publications.

The book posits a strangely narrow definition of love, too: Garber is much more interested in flirtation, seduction, and the light-headedness of infatuation than in the deeper and more complicated matter of long-term leasing or ownership. By contrast, Cheryl Mendelson's recent book, "Home Comforts: The Art and Science of Keeping House" (Scribner; $35) is a hymn to the satisfactions of commitment. "Home Comforts," an encyclopedia of home maintenance, is essentially conservative: it is written, Mendelson says, for participants in and offspring of the sexual revolution—those unfortunates who were not instructed by their mothers or grandmothers in how to defrost food safely or to remove water marks from varnished tabletops or to stop white pillowcases from turning yellow. Mendelson's devotion to domesticity also bespeaks a kind of love, but she assumes her readership to be less interested in the titillations of house porn than in the practicalities of making sure that love, and linen, last.



"They're the lucky ones. We're headed for telemarketing."

She insists that her book is suggestive, not prescriptive: each person should choose which hints to follow from the thousands offered in eight hundred and fifty-odd pages. (Her diagram for how to put a duvet inside a duvet cover looks like the kind of thing that David Copperfield gets paid a fortune for performing in Vegas.) Still, the book's cumulative effect can be daunting; if Mendelson thinks it worth explaining how to cut up old towels and T-shirts and store them in different ragbags or boxes according to the chores for which they are destined, surely it would be slovenly not to follow her example. It's rather reassuring to come across passages in which Mendelson declares a housekeeping task to be beyond her capabilities, such as when she addresses the stopped-up-toilet problem. "If the plunger does not work, the Plumbing-Heating-Cooling Information Bureau recommends that you try a 'closet auger' or a 'snake,'" she writes. "Be careful not to let it get stuck in the toilet, because there may be no getting it out without destroying the toilet. I do not know just how you might avoid this, which is why I would call the plumber before matters come to this pass." Mendelson has a dry wit, and in passing moments her editorial voice shifts from the monitory or pedagogical to the archly intimate, in which she hints at the erotic valence of the home. There's a brief passage in which she sums up her first marriage, which she embarked on while pursuing an academic career, to a man with a profound aversion to housekeeping. "At one point, I remember, I desperately constructed a philosophical defense of dusting under the furniture; and things got considerably less rational before the all-too-predictable end arrived," she writes, and this is as promising a germ of a domestic novella as might be found anywhere.

"Home Comforts" is the kind of book that the Marjorie Garbers of the future will read for clues to the domestic lives of the American middle classes at the turn of the twenty-first century: Why were they obsessed with antibacterial soap? What was that whole family-bed thing about? If "Home Comforts" has a larger cultural message, it's that Americans, infantilized by labor-saving devices and a service industry that has put even the smallest mending or cleaning task into the hands of professionals, no longer feel at home in their own homes. Rather than loving their houses, Mendelson's Americans are a little intimidated by them, and are convinced of their own powerlessness to prevent domestic decline, the encroachment of dust and stain and mildew. Mendelson isn't concerned with igniting a love affair between reader and domicile; instead, her book offers guidelines for reaching a kind of happy, rich coexistence with one's home, achieved by understanding what is required to maintain it. Her book is about reaching a satisfying accommodation with one's accommodation; it sounds less like a romance and more like a marriage. ♦

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BOOKS

DOG'S TEARS

Denis Johnson moves to academe.

BY JOHN UPDIKE

There is a kind of radiant prose, sparking in short circuits, that can be achieved only through a point of view that is youthful and stoned:

> I stood outside the motel hitchhiking, dressed up in a hurry, shirtless under my jacket, with the wind crying through my earring. A bus came. I climbed aboard and sat on the plastic seat while the things of our city turned in the windows like the images in a slot machine.

> It was a Polish neighborhood somewhere or other. The Polish neighborhoods have that snow. They have that fruit with the light on it, they have that music you can't find. We ended up in a laundromat, where the guy took off his shirt and put it in a washer.

> The sky was a bruised red shot with black, almost exactly the colors of a tattoo. Sunset had two minutes left to live.

These quotations are from Denis Johnson's "Jesus' Son," a 1992 collection of short stories that was recently made into a motion picture. Though the book is short, it offers a definitive description of a certain world, a drug user's nineteen-seventies world, remembered in an agreeable haze. It calls to mind Jayne Anne Phillips's youthful "Black Tickets," and the short stories of Thom Jones and Raymond Carver, though Jones's heroes are more muscular and Carver's less airily down and out than Johnson's, being drunks in various stages of desperation and reform rather than heroin addicts. We are reminded, further, of the gleaming economy and aggressive minimalism of early Hemingway, the Hemingway of "In Our Time," with its paragraph-long prose poems sandwiched between stories distinguished by their beautifully bleak language and dialogues of non-connection. Like Hemingway at eighteen, the typical Johnson hero has known death, been in and out of his body, and seen life by an X-raying black light. "Catty-corner from me," a narrator in "Jesus' Son" relates, "sat a dear little black child maybe sixteen, all messed up on skag. She couldn't keep her head up. She couldn't stay out of her dreams. She knew: shit, we might as well have been drinking a dog's tears. Nothing mattered except that we were alive."

Johnson's new novel, "The Name of the World" (HarperCollins; $22), also has the translucent taste of dog's tears, but its hero, Mike Reed, is fifty-three, "baby faced . . . with cheery blue eyes," and ensconced in academe. Shakily and marginally ensconced, it is true, as an Adjunct Associate Professor of History, a post that seems to involve little besides a few "small seminars," rather like Writer in Residence; he is nevertheless tamed by an establishment and subject to its politics. Four years ago, Reed's thirty-four-year-old wife and four-year-old daughter were killed in an auto accident, having accepted a ride from a senile neighbor in the aftermath of an ice storm. Since then, the widower, "virtually dead," has gone through the motions of living, finding obscure consolation in watching the students skate around and around the pond of his Midwestern university and in pondering the "sorrowful concentricity" of an anonymous slave's drawing in the art museum. "Man is but a reed," Pascal wrote, "the weakest in nature, but he is a thinking reed." Though Mike Reed is not Jesus' son (a quote from Lou Reed's song "Heroin"), Johnson's eerie clarity of description, with its subtly askew precision, remains:

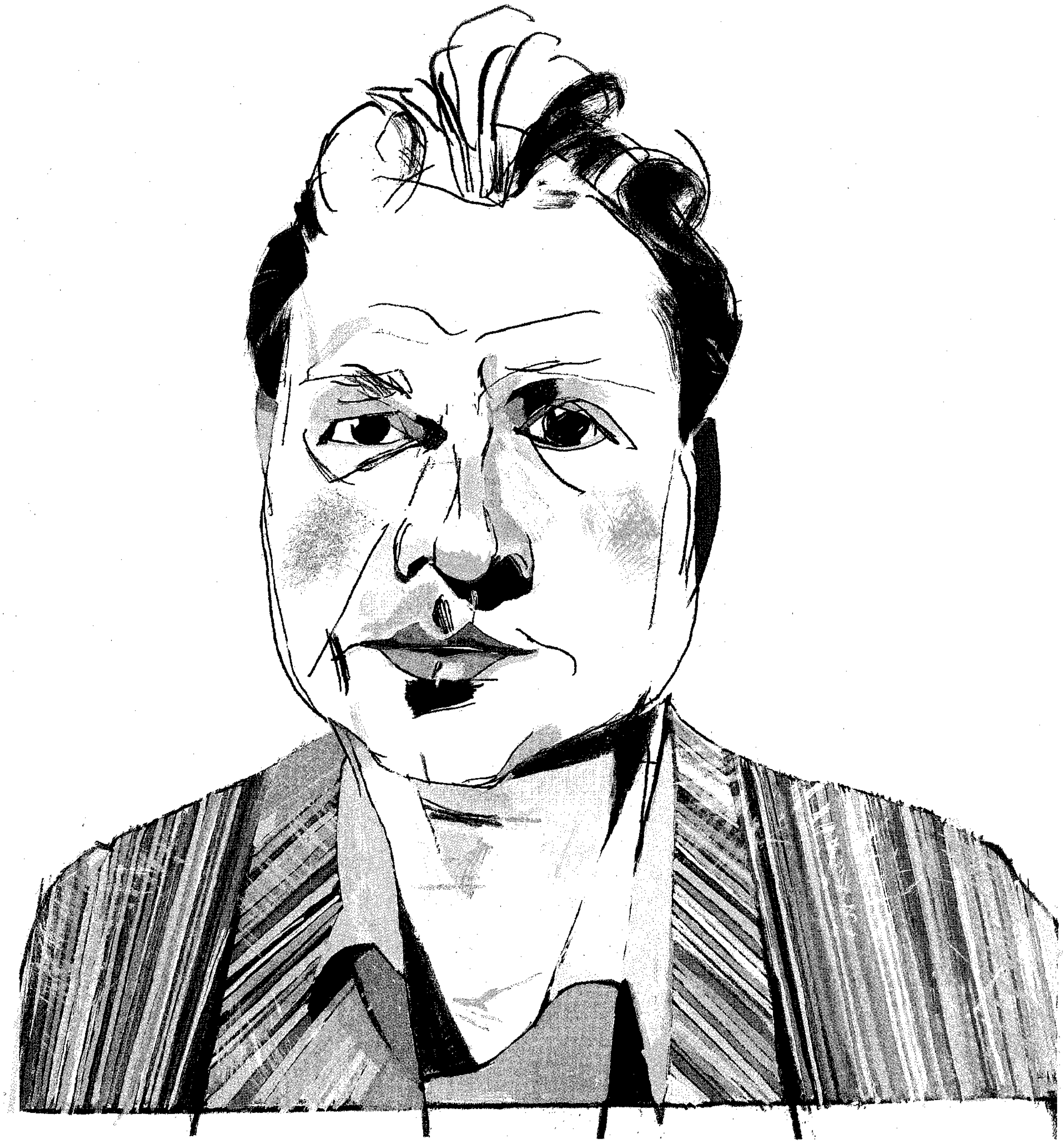
> This day of my visit to the Swan's Grove Campus the weather felt new. Winter's edges had been pushed back, the sidewalks were clear and the roads were dry. The deep snow in the fields had collapsed into dimples that had become, at last, here and there, craters with soaked gray pasture at their bottoms.

Yet the world of a middle-aged academic simply does not yield the numinous dishevellment, the shimmer of blithe violence, common in the surreal milieu of a young addict and odd-jobber. Abrupt and casual auto accidents, a frequent feature of "Jesus' Son," have taken on a weight of consequence. After four years of not

RICCARDO VECCHIO

having a car, Reed gets into a B.M.W. and floors the pedal, but his courtship of a fatal accident ends when, having "worn myself out going too fast," he pulls over, calms down, drives safely home, and parks the car in his garage. The events of this academic novel flirt with predictability: the faculty scheming, the learned freeloading, the abruptly terminated position, the professor's sexual attraction to a graduate student. The student, bearing the symbolically double-barrelled name of Flower Cannon, pops up variously in Mike Reed's life: as a tipsy, white-shouldered cellist at a faculty dinner party; as an art-department performance artist publicly shaving her pubic hair; as a college caterer's waitress; as the naked winner of an off-campus dive's Friday dance contest; as a participant in the Sing Night of the Anabaptist Friesland Fellowship; and, finally, in the short novel's longest scene, as a friendly and fey, if elusive, conquest. It is Mike Reed, actually, who does the eluding, fleeing Flower's compliant presence when the memory of his wife and daughter short-circuits his desire.

The author, increasingly authorial and confiding as the book goes on, tells us, "Looking over the pages of this reminiscence, I see I've misled. I've created the impression that what I've been aiming at is the account of a one-night stand, and that the item pending most crucially between Flower and me was my loss of a kind of late-life virginity." O.K., but if not that, what? Johnson loses us in the later pages, which look back upon his university days from a curious paradise he has found as a journalist during the Gulf War. Flower, though lovingly sculpted, in touch after touch, as the book builds toward their culminating intimacy, melts away, and is retrospectively dismissed in a rude voice: "As for Flower Cannon, I have no idea what's become of her, but if I ever track her down I'm sure she'll be up to something quite shocking and also ab-



Johnson's new novel, "The Name of the World," has an eerie clarity of description and a subtly askew precision.

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solutely no surprise." Like the feckless, scattered heroes of "Jesus' Son," where women are generally bedraggled and ill-used, and like the buzz-brained principals in Johnson's lengthy, witty, and wild exercise in California noir, "Already Dead," Mike Reed is too advanced in the school of life to be transformed by a sexual encounter. He is looking for something more, something unnamable. When Flower asks for a phrase in his handwriting, to add to a collection of such phrases she keeps in a wooden box, he pens, "The name of the world." It gives the novel its title but not, for me, a meaning.

The hero's sense of meaning emerges in his nostalgia for a drug trip's benignly pointless, potentially revelatory confusion. The fondly evoked dives of "Jesus' Son" have a tame equivalent in a basement tavern in the new novel's university town: "Here I've let my memory veer down the stairs and float alongside the bar and hover in the light of the jukebox, when actually there's no point. Nothing worth telling about happened down there. Or up in the world, for that matter." Point arrives in the poetic coinages such venues stimulate in Johnson: of a habituée he writes, "Eloise laughed and hacked. She had the smashed sinuses of an English bulldog." The metaphor is smashing, and Mike Reed comes closest to pleasure in the presence of things being smashed: at the novel's end, the Gulf War has him flying "through black smoke overclouding a world pocked by burning oil wells like flickering signals of distress, of helplessness" and praising this, in an oddly prim phrase, as "a life I believe to be utterly remarkable."

There is religion in Johnson, a memory of visions. Like Allen Ginsberg's "angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night," Mike Reed has glimpsed at the world's core a kind of glowing jelly. Formal religious structures and creeds don't hold this jelly but constitute a memorial to it, a vacated tabernacle. At the novel's spiritual climax, Reed has followed Flower to Friesland Sing Night, where the singing is transcendental: "They sang in multiple harmony, in a fullness and with a competence that didn't seem studied, but perfectly natural, innate, all talent. I heard none of the usual bad voices." In the midst of this music, it comes to our thinking Reed that there is no God:

> I didn't think often about that which people called God, *but for some time now I'd* certainly hated it, this killer, this perpetrator, in whose blank silver eyes nobody was too insignificant, too unremarkable, too innocent and small to be overlooked in the parceling out of tragedy. I'd felt this all-powerful thing as a darkness and weight. Now it had vanished. A tight winding of chains had burst. Someone had unstuck my eyes. A huge ringing in my head had stopped. This is what the grand and lovely multitude of singers did to me.

The moment seems psychologically clear: Reed absolves the depersonalized universe of blame for the deaths of his wife and daughter. He feels his heart "going up and up into an endless interval with nothing to get in the way. All my happy liberated soul came out my throat." The remaining forty pages, including his long-anticipated tryst with Flower Cannon, are a relative muddle, full of effortful enigmas and presumably pregnant pauses. She comes toward him "carrying her message from a vanished god," and he says (he thinks), "I still can't feel anything," a by now rather tired post-Romantic boast that elicits "no response from Flower. Maybe she didn't hear." Non-response is followed by non-coition; Mike Reed achieves closure by assaulting a car full of teen-age youths, fleeing town, and, as an existential Foreign Legionnaire, joining the Gulf War.

Like the Bible, "The Name of the World" ends on an apocalyptic note:

> Our century has torn its way out of its chrysalis and become too beautiful to be examined, too alive to be debated and exploited by played-out intellectuals. The important thing is no longer to predict in what way its grand convulsions might next shake us. Now the important thing is to ride it into the sky.

To hope that limited, tactical struggles like the Gulf War are big enough to ride into the sky seems optimistic. Fireworks aren't a spaceship launch. Explosions don't last, and Denis Johnson's radioactive wine holds up best in small bottles, before the decay of rhetoric sets in. This novel about anomic grief thirsts for tears; the hero winds up crying into a bathtub, "a tiny flood of my own tears, enough to fill a shot glass." He then supplements the tears by turning on the faucet, and bathes "until my bath was cold." Through a possible short circuit of my own, this bathos left me cold. ◆

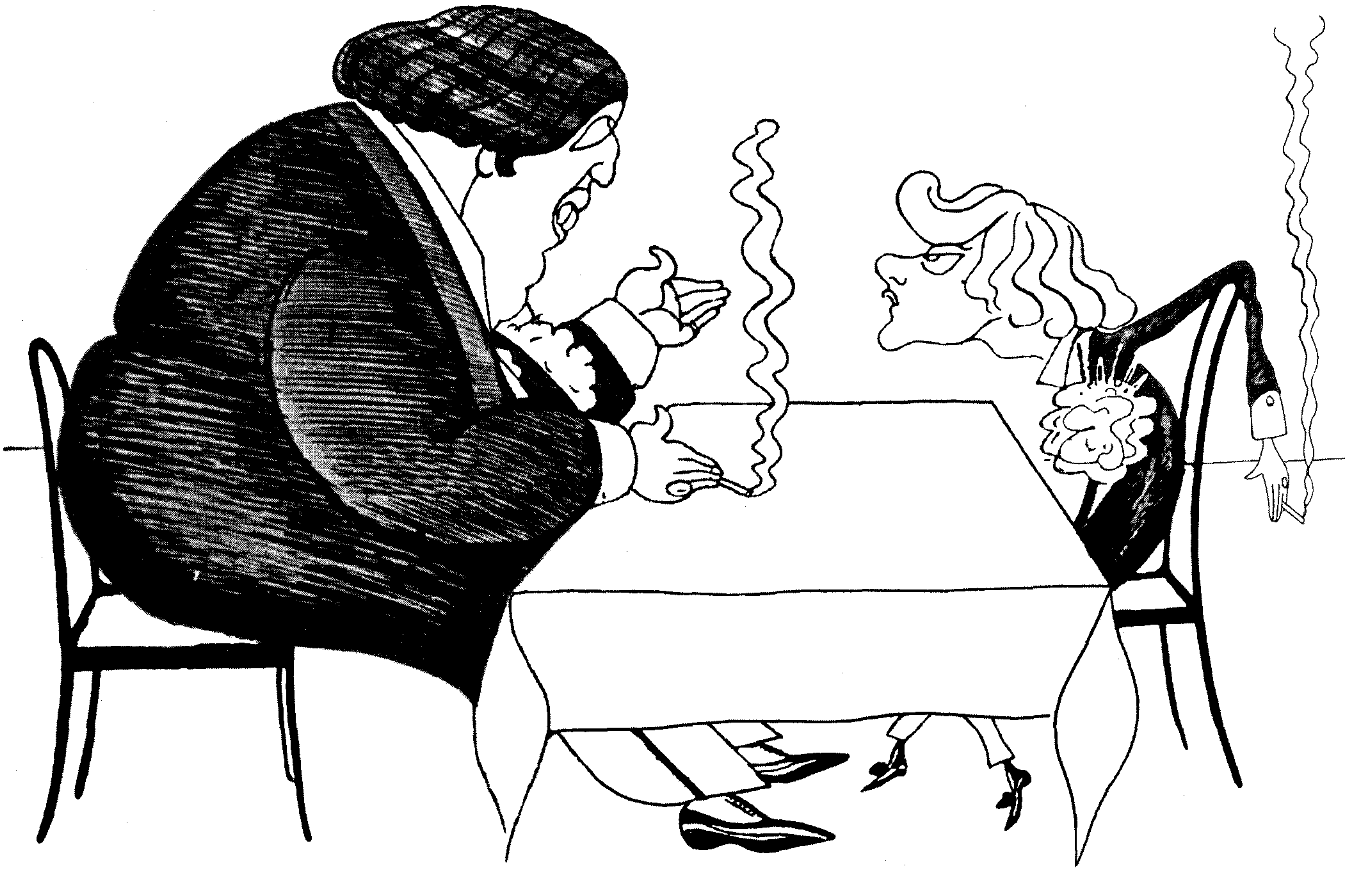
BOOKS

STRANGE FRUIT

A new biography tries to save Lord Alfred Douglas from himself.

BY ALEX ROSS

Douglas Murray's "Bosie: A Biography of Lord Alfred Douglas" (Talk Miramax Books; $27.50) is the sometimes charming, sometimes chilling story of an ex-boy. He had two names and two lives. His first career was as the loveliest male undergraduate of his day—"darling Bosie," the "slim gilt soul" of Magdalen College, Oxford, the Hyacinthus who dangled on the arm of Oscar Wilde's Apollo. So strong was his charisma that the dons called him a poet before they even glanced down at his poetry. Then, in 1895, Wilde went to jail, in the wake of a sexual persecution that had been set in motion by Bosie's disaster of a father. The shock of the scandal seemed to freeze Bosie at an awkward point in his development. He did not grow up; instead, he let himself be overtaken by the underside of the adolescent mind, the one that cherishes obscure hurts. He became defined not by his passions but by his hatreds. After various false starts in the public eye, he won infamy in his own right, by libelling Winston Churchill as the agent of a worldwide Jewish conspiracy.



Bosie's affair with Oscar Wilde gave him a notoriety to which he became addicted, and which he struggled mightily to maintain.

COURTESY MAX BEERBOHM ESTATE, LONDON MANAGEMENT

"Bosie" is one of those biographies which attempt to rehabilitate a historical loser. When you see a new book about Richard III or Mad King Ludwig or General Custer, you can be sure that the author wishes us to know that the subject was not as evil or crazy or stupid as we thought. Murray is plainly fond of Bosie, and seems to identify with him more than a little. He completed this biography at the age of twenty, and is still a student at Magdalen College, where Bosie sashayed about in his boater a hundred years earlier. It's a stunningly elegant book for a twenty-year-old. It moves with confidence and avoids the pileup of minutiae that clogs so many modern biographies. But there's something indefinably amiss. Arch, oblivious, a bit careless in places, it evokes the mind of its subject almost too well. It could have been written in 1960, or even in 1930. This is the world as Bosie saw it, and the vista is bizarre.

The Douglas clan had a history of erratic behavior. The line went back to William, "the Black Douglas," who fought alongside Robert the Bruce. In the eighteenth century, Murray writes, a Douglas ancestor known as the "cannibalistic idiot" was found roasting a kitchen boy on a spit. Bosie's father, the eighth Marquess of Queensberry, lived in a state of perpetual rage and found ways to alienate every stratum of London society. A militant atheist, he once threw vegetables during a performance of a Tennyson play because he found its depiction of atheism insulting. One of

BRIEFLY NOTED

Wainewright the Poisoner, *by Andrew Motion (Knopf; $26).* Thomas Griffiths Wainewright (1794-1847) was an artist and writer who knew many of the most prominent figures of the Romantic age—he painted Lord Byron, collected Blake's works, and dined with the leading essayists, painters, and poets of the time. His talents, alas, were not up to those of his acquaintances, and his career never took off. Hard up for money, he became a forger, and likely a murderer, and was eventually convicted of the lesser crime and transported to Tasmania. Motion, Great Britain's current poet laureate, has excavated the record of Wainewright's life and constructed an imaginary apologia *pro vita sua.* Motion does a brilliant job of assuming both the language and the attitudes of his subject, and the result is a chilling exploration of the tragic possibilities of self-regard.

Me Talk Pretty One Day, *by David Sedaris (Little, Brown; $22.95).* Audaciously combining memoir, essay, and what has to be fiction (even the silliest examples of contemporary cuisine, deservedly and delightfully mocked here, could not include aspirin sauce), this fourth collection of short pieces offers pleasures normally to be found only in the best novels and the rare standup act that is actually funny. We get the trajectory of the author's life so far (growing up gay in North Carolina, with four sisters and confidently eccentric parents; becoming a conceptual artist, on speed; moving to New York and working for bizarre employers; settling in France with his beloved), but at a rakish angle: no one finds it more ridiculous than he does. "This American Life" radio fans will miss Sedaris's revelatory Billie Holiday impression, but the lack is more than made up for by his retranslations into English of his attempts to speak French, which inspired the book's title.

The Better Angel: Walt Whitman in the Civil War, *by Roy Morris, Jr. (Oxford; $25).* Drawing on letters and notebooks, Morris endows this episode from the past with the immediacy of contemporary reportage. The editor of the magazine *America's Civil War,* he believes that biographers have scanted Whitman's years as a volunteer in military hospital wards around Washington, although the poet's activities tell us a great deal both about him as a human being and about how Americans experienced and remembered the terrible war between the states. The medical inadequacies of the era were appalling, and Whitman was horrified by the suffering of the young soldiers. Nonetheless, he always seemed to know what to say to the men and what to bring them (writing paper, for instance); his empathy and tact were heroic. Morris suggests that Whitman's attachment to his patients may have had a sublimated sexual dimension, but his love for these "sons" appears more paternal than erotic.

Stonedial, *by George Konrád, translated from the Hungarian by Ivan Sanders (Harcourt; $24).* In 1992, the Jewish Hungarian writer János Dragomán, an aging rake and respected international celebrity, visits his home town, Kandor, where he hopes to stay out of local affairs and leave without incident. But Kandor provides not only new complications—a daughter and a grandchild he never knew, wives ready to betray their husbands for him, a young pyromaniac who forces Dragomán to witness his death—but also the urgent memory of old moral choices. Konrád's vision of the new world of Central Europe is a place where the exiles and the homeless—the itinerant philosopher rogue Dragomán among them—must painstakingly rebuild their lives in the midst of bitter legacies, even as they face a precarious future.

Queensberry's brothers slit his throat; another died during a foolish ascent of the Matterhorn. Various members of the family died in ambiguous gun accidents. Bosie's aunt Florrie, a famous Victorian eccentric, kept a pet jaguar, which ran amok and killed several of the Queen's favorite deer.

Queensberry was addicted to contrarian opinions, and his son inherited the trait. Indeed, it's possible that Bosie's youthful homosexuality was more a calculated act than an expression of his heart. Murray, at least, seems to think the gay thing went only skin deep; he writes that public-school sex play "rubbed off" on Bosie and that "buggery almost certainly did not take place between the Winchester boys." How certain can he be? When he quotes a cute anecdote from the school paper, in which Bosie and another boy struggle over a Try Your Strength machine, Murray seems not to realize that the story is a sniggering parable of anal sex, in which Bosie, who preferred to be on top, feels "unwonted pressure from behind." By the time the naughty boy got to Oxford, he was celebrating the unspeakable in the pages of the periodicals that he edited. He wrote, famously, of "the Love that dare not speak its name."

Historians still squabble over the nature and extent of Bosie's relationship with Wilde. Most writers cast the young man as the fickle, petulant one, who manipulated Wilde in order to stage a confrontation with his father. Murray makes a plausible case that Bosie was the more faithful of the two. He did not slink away when the money ran out, as Wilde himself claimed in his last years. It was Bosie, in fact, who contributed large sums and received little gratitude in return. He really was in love, it seems, even if the relationship was sexual only for a brief time, and only up to a certain point. In a later memoir, he spelled things out as clearly as he could manage: "Of the sin which takes its name from one of the Cities of the Plain there never was the slightest question." No, Bosie and Oscar did the Gomorrah.

After Wilde's death, in 1900, the gears of Bosie's brain began grinding in reverse. He cultivated a hatred of members of the Wilde circle, and, in particular, of Robert Ross, the executor of the

Wilde estate. Bosie did have grounds to be unhappy with the way he was portrayed in the first Wilde biographies, but there was no call for him to become an avenging angel of Old Testament morality. The transformation was abrupt: "darling Bosie" gave way to the second coming of the Black Douglas. He married, produced a son, embraced Catholicism, and loudly condemned the very Cities of the Plain in which he had recently tarried. He spluttered against "sodomites" and "filthy buggers" just as his father had before him. His dispute with Ross, like almost all his disputes in these years, ended up in the headlines and in the courts. In 1913 and 1914, he essentially re-staged the trials of 1895, with Ross in the role of Wilde and himself in the role of his father.

It all makes a certain amount of psychological sense, even if Douglas's behavior was repugnantly hypocritical. The campaign that followed—Douglas vs. the Jews—is harder to fathom. The need to cause a stink may have been at the root of it. Douglas smelled a trend; in the wake of the First World War, many Europeans had come to believe that the Jews were to blame for the carnage, and "The Protocols of the Elders of Zion," a document purporting to be the transcript of a Jewish conspiracy to take over the world, slithered out of Russia into Germany and points west. Henry Ford publicized the "Protocols" in America, and Douglas was perhaps their most prominent advocate in England, even though the London *Times* soon exposed them as a hoax. Douglas went on to accuse Winston Churchill—the First Lord of the Admiralty during the First World War—of arranging the death of Lord Kitchener at the behest of Jewish financiers. Churchill sued him, and he spent six months in jail.

In this phase of Douglas's life, Murray's biography becomes a whitewash. It fails to describe the contents of *Plain English*, a periodical that Douglas founded in 1920. Murray, in a close paraphrase of prior biographers, writes that *Plain English* made "few specific attacks" on Jews, despite "frequent implications" of "Jewish conspiracies." Did he bother to look at the thing? Here are some quotations found at random: "The negroes in the United States are being organized by the Jew Seligman." "There are more Kikes—'Kike' being the American for Jew—in New York than there are in Warsaw." Headline from the editor's notes: "HUMAN SACRIFICE AMONG THE JEWS." Social analysis from the editor: "It is strange that the Jew, with all his race-memory, forgets the lessons of the past, and heads again and again for destruction by exasperating the people among whom he dwells." Words in support of the Ku Klux Klan. The racial musings of one Major-General Count A. Cherep-Spiridovitch. And, toward the end, a letter reporting on the legal difficulties of a like-minded German publication, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, and on the political party with which it was associated. The party's leader, "Herr Hittler," was said to be "spirited." This was in 1921, when Hitler was unknown outside his home town of Munich.

Douglas's anti-Semitism did have one beneficial side effect: it jazzed up his poetry, which, without the titillation of boy-boy love, had become monumentally dull. Here is a sonnet from the sequence "In Excelsis," which the poet's admirers cite as his masterpiece. Murray, in a fit of discretion, quotes only the first two lines and the last four, but the poem is worth reading in full:

The leprous spawn of scattered Israel
Spreads its contagion in your English blood;
Teeming corruption rises like a flood
Whose fountain swelters in the womb of hell.
Your Jew-kept politicians buy and sell
In markets redolent of Jewish mud,
And while the "Learned Elders" chew the cud
Of liquidation's fruits, they weave their spell.
They weave the spell that binds the heart's desire
To gold and gluttony and sweating lust:
In hidden holds they stew the mandrake mess
That kills the soul and turns the blood to fire,
They weave the spell that turns desire to dust
And postulates the abyss of nothingness.

In technical terms, this is the best of the poems that Murray quotes. It lacks the surfeit of redundant adjectives that mars most of his other work. Compare these lines addressed to his wife:

When in dim dreams I trace the tangled maze
Of the old years that held and fashioned me,
And to the sad assize of Memory
From the wan roads and misty time-trod ways,
The timid ghosts of dead forgotten days
Gather to hold their piteous colloquy,
Chiefly my soul bemoans the lack of thee
And those lost seasons empty of thy praise.

On the subject of love, Douglas throws words around in vain. On the subject of the Jews, he is in his element, expending rage in an intellectual vacuum. If you were in a charitable mood, you might compare him with the better modern rap artists, like Dr. Dre and Eminem.

In old age, Douglas softened somewhat. He ended his anti-gay tirades and went as far as to argue that homosexuality should be decriminalized. He apologized to Churchill, saying that he had done him an injustice. He did not, however, apologize to the Jews, and maintained his far-right sympathies. He sent a friendly letter to Mussolini and supported Franco in the Spanish Civil War. In 1938, during the Munich crisis, he wrote of Hitler, "I am entirely on his side." When Hitler invaded Poland, he changed his tack, writing a last mediocre sonnet in praise of Churchill, who had been generous enough to forgive him. It is doubtful, however, whether Churchill had forgotten any detail of what happened in the early twenties. The saving grace of the episode—indeed, of Douglas's entire career—may have been that Churchill, at the outset of his years in the wilderness, was able to get a good look at anti-Semitism in its essential crudity and stupidity.

Lord Alfred Douglas died on March 20, 1945. He was an exemplary twentieth-century celebrity, who won fame at an early age and then devised ever more gruesome ways of getting himself back in the news. He remained adolescent to the end. He would play the bully until he came up against determined opposition, at which point he would try to write everything off as a joke. He wrote his own epitaph with a parable about betrayal, and in it you can hear a pitiful echo of the imperial Wilde:

> After his death Judas Iscariot, with the characteristic gall of his type, presented himself at the entrance of Heaven and was refused admission by the angel at the gate. "Why can't I come in?" inquired Judas. "Well, you know you betrayed the Saviour for thirty pieces of silver," replied the angel. "Good heavens!" said Judas Iscariot, "have you *no* sense of humour?" ◆

HOW'S THAT AGAIN? DEPARTMENT
From the Times.

Fortunately, Mike Piazza was wearing a helmet with an ear flap. It may have saved his career, if not his life.

A CRITIC AT LARGE

FIRST BASS

How Edgar Meyer makes light of the bulkiest instrument.

BY MARK LEVINE

One evening a few months ago, three of the world's top string players gathered at Avery Fisher Hall to offer a cheerful demonstration of the hybrid state of American classical music. Yo-Yo Ma, the most celebrated cellist of his generation, was seated stage left. Across from him stood Mark O'Connor, a lanky, long-haired violinist who won fiddling contests in Texas as a child, and who has six times been named Musician of the Year by the Country Music Association. Standing between them was the thirty-nine-year-old bass player Edgar Meyer, who may be the most remarkable virtuoso in the relatively unchronicled history of his instrument. Meyer is a musical chameleon who is equally at home supplying the bass line for Schubert's "Trout" Quintet, working as a studio musician for Emmylou Harris and Garth Brooks, and playing the demanding solo part in his own concerto for double bass and orchestra. (Along with Ma and the Boston Symphony Orchestra, he helped open this summer's Tanglewood Music Festival with a performance of his Double Concerto for Cello and Bass.)

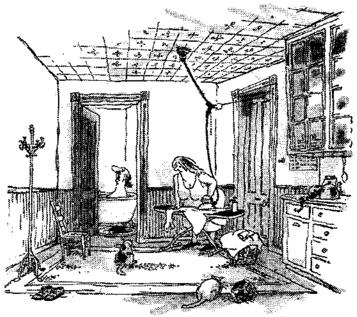
On this occasion, he was rejoining a trio whose 1996 album of rough-hewn riffs and keening folk tunes, "Appalachia Waltz," was a best-seller on the classical/crossover charts, and whose follow-up album, "Appalachian Journey," had just been released. The program began with a piece entitled "1B," which Meyer composed as a violin exercise for his seven-year-old son, George. Like much of his music, it had an immediacy that was at once childlike and sophisticated—a whirling tunefulness wrapped in trance-like rhythms that evoked the chaotic choreography of kids in a playground. For the most part, Meyer stayed in the background, content to supply a thumping beat while Ma and O'Connor matched each other with virtuosic, muscular bowing. But when the music called for Meyer to seize the foreground, he transformed his bass into an instrument of astonishing delicacy and color. During a stretch of solo playing in a piece entitled "Emily's Reel," his bass had the doleful, ethereal sound of a remote echo. In a gorgeous oddity, "Druid Fluid," which braided together strains of Baroque music, folk tunes, and blues, the instrument embraced moody lyricism and dronelike percussiveness. Meyer produces the kind of straight tone favored by early-music specialists, and it gave everything he played a raw, unmanufactured quality—demonstrating that even this burly instrument could be made to sound as plaintive as any wailing guitar.

When the trio launched into several O'Connor compositions from "Appalachian Journey," the music slid perilously close to the old-timey soundtrack of a sepia-bathed Ken Burns documentary. But in Meyer's pieces the music went beyond generalized nostalgia to create a world that had the strange yet familiar feeling of a Cornell box. Baroque figuration bumped up against country heartache; the rhythmic and harmonic thorniness of modern classical music merged with the twangy bravado of bluegrass. Occasionally, as in a piece entitled "Schizoozy," there was a raw blast of energy that summoned up the spirit of seventies hard rock.

"I've unconsciously been doing a survey of all the music I've ever heard," Meyer told me before the concert. "Most of the music I've become interested in is hybrid in its origins. It's real hard to find a pure strain of anything. Classical music, of course, is unbelievably hybrid. Jazz is an obvious amalgam. Bluegrass comes from eighteenth-century Scottish and Irish folk music that made contact with the blues. By exploring music, you're exploring everything."

It's never been easy to know what to expect from Edgar Meyer. In the late eighties, he released a series of record-

The Artist.
The Philosophy.
The Funny Business.



"How about supper in the tub tonight, hon?"

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Meyer is at home in everything from Schubert to jazz. Photograph by Marc Royce.

ings on MCA that ranged from jazz and contemporary classical to ambient music and the blues. These albums, which pushed the vogue for eclecticism to the point of incoherence, were an early instance of what the classical violinist Joshua Bell calls "Edgar-music." In 1998, with the Emerson String Quartet, Meyer recorded his luminous "Quintet." It's a piece that sounds as if the mystic minimalists Henryk Górecki and Arvo Pärt had suddenly gone down home. In the mid-eighties, Meyer founded a band, Strength in Numbers, which specialized in a highly sophisticated form of bluegrass, dubbed "newgrass." Although the group made only one recording, "The Telluride Sessions," in 1989, bootleg tapes of its performances are highly prized in college-town record stores. Through Strength in Numbers, Meyer became involved with some of the most inventive nonclassical instrumentalists in the country. His 1997 recording "Uncommon Ritual," a collaboration with the great improvisatory banjo player Béla Fleck and the guitarist Mike Marshall, ranges from a transcription of a Bach fugue to bluegrass and swing. On "Short Trip Home," which Sony released last year, and which is perhaps his most exhilarating album to date, Meyer and Marshall joined Joshua Bell and the legendary mandolin player Sam Bush in a brilliantly fresh argument for bluegrass as a smart, unpredictable—and completely unpretentious—form of American classical music.

Bass players are generally the most stationary of musicians, setting loose their fingers and arms while keeping their torsos and legs still. Meyer's relationship with his instrument, however, is intensely physical. At Lincoln Center, he sometimes draped himself over the frame of the bass in a languorous embrace. At other times, he stood apart, flicking at the strings with his bow, as though the bass were playing *him*. Sometimes the two of them, swaying in tandem, seemed entirely lost in the music together. Watching this mating dance, I was reminded of something Susan Ranney, the principal bass player of the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, said to me: "I don't consider that Edgar and I play the same instrument. He is a soul that has decided to locate itself in a bass."

In the classical-music world, bassists have long struggled for respect. David Finckel, the cellist of the Emerson String Quartet, regards Meyer as "unquestionably up there with the great players on any instrument." Nonetheless, he finds it odd that a musician of Meyer's calibre would devote himself to so limited an instrument. "It's easy to understand why one would take up the violin or cello or flute," Finckel says. "But why one would freely choose to take up the double bass is beyond me. Perhaps it's genetic."

Gary Karr, who is the best-known classical-bass soloist of the generation before Meyer's, says that one reason for the instrument's low esteem among classical musicians is that the opportunities for self-display come down mostly to several concertos by the less than household name of Giovanni Bottesini, a nineteenth-century bass virtuoso and a composer of romantic showiness. Karr can catalogue the indignities he has endured on behalf of the instrument: the conductors who have ordered him to lower his volume to the point of inaudibility ("The bass," he says gloomily, "is the bullfrog of the orchestra"); the times he has stood in baggage-claim areas and watched his seventeenth-century Amati get jammed coming down the chute. Then why devote your life to it? Karr says, "From Day One, I felt that the bass was part of my body. Its sound was my sound. If chocolate could sing, it would sound like the double bass."

Meyer says simply, "The bass doesn't appeal to me. I *am* the bass."

"My parents tell me that I've wanted to play the bass ever since I was two," Meyer said to me one recent afternoon. We were sitting on unpainted rocking chairs on the screened-in porch of his house in Nashville, where he lives with his wife, Connie Heard, a violinist who is a member of the Blair String Quartet, at Vanderbilt University, and their son, George. Meyer, who was wearing white sneakers, rumpled khakis, and an untucked shirt, looked boyishly unkempt. A bulky man with the physique of an ex-linebacker, he spoke shyly, as if it might seem immodest to talk too much about himself. "My parents took pictures of me holding a broom and a vine, pretending I'm playing," he said. "It's not real mysterious. The bass was my father's instrument, and I loved him and looked up to him. From before I can remember, my identity was as a bass player."

Meyer's father, who was also named Edgar, and who died in 1988, grew up on a farm outside Chattanooga. Self-taught on the instrument, he toured the South with jazz bands before settling in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where he directed the string program in the local public schools. He started his son on the bass at the age of five. When Meyer turned ten, his father presented him with the gift of a twenty-five-dollar bass of nebulous Czech origins, a scarred specimen that, with its top removed, had been used as a planter. The elder Meyer had a large collection of jazz recordings, featuring such bass stars as Ray Brown, Paul Chambers, and Ron Carter, but every Sunday, all day long, he played classical music. "That," Meyer says, "was my childhood religious experience."

Meyer made extraordinary progress on the instrument with seemingly little effort. As a child, he rarely practiced more than forty-five minutes a day. (This continues to be the case.) At the same time, since the category of child prodigy does not extend to bassists, he did not envision a musical career. "I grew up really laid back on the instrument, thinking it was just a blast," he said. "I spent a lot of time jamming with a couple of buddies—a trombonist and a bassoonist—just doing free-improv stuff. I played piano in high-school jazz bands, and I played bass for the church choir, and my dad and I did a lot of weddings and bar mitzvahs." For years, Meyer thought of becoming a mathematician, and today his favorite airplane reading is books about math. But after a year at Georgia Tech he changed his mind and enrolled in Indiana University's School of Music. From the outset, he knew that the standard career path for a classically trained bassist—vying for orchestral positions, and taking one's dutiful place on the periphery of the musical action—didn't suit him. "There was no chance of that," he said. "I was interested in *music*—which includes much more than the orchestral repertoire." If Meyer had any model at all, it was the boundary-leaping trumpeter Wynton Marsalis. But Meyer's teacher at Indiana, Stuart Sankey, discouraged eclecticism. Sankey, who was also Gary Karr's teacher, told me, "I really didn't think it was a good idea for Edgar to straddle classical and jazz. The demands are just too different, and I tried to convince Edgar that he'd have to make a choice. He kept refusing." Meyer supplemented his classical training with gigs as an accompanist for a black gospel choir, a Latin band, and a country singer; he also played improvisational jazz piano at bars. Once, as a lark, he entered a fiddle contest on his bass, and placed respectably. "I think people's response was along the lines of 'Wow, the dog can talk,' " he said.

Meyer seems entirely comfortable moving between his home in country music's capital and his forays into the classical world, between his itinerant life as a collaborative player and the solitude it takes to compose. "It would feel unnatural for me to separate performing from writing music," he told me. "For me, it's all continuous. I can't think of any living composers who are at the level of accomplishment as performers that we imagine Beethoven and Mozart and Bach were. But a lot of the leading jazz players write their own music and play it. It's the same with a lot of bluegrass musicians. Whatever one thinks of Rachmaninoff's achievement as a composer, I find the degree of continuity between his playing and writing to be quite natural."

We were in his upstairs studio in Nashville, a small room with sloping ceilings, bare walls, and a floor strewn with sheet music, faxes, and CDs. "I was always writing music," Meyer said. "I wrote whatever I felt like. As a kid, I wrote a lot of little pop songs, then I started writing pieces to play with my friends. If they were classical players, it would be written-out stuff, and if they were improvising players it would be a melody, and then we'd improvise over it." Before long, he began composing for his own instrument. "If I wanted to have a cool piece to play with my friends, I knew I'd have to write it," he said. "It's always been that way for me—

ROADSIDE STAND

In the watermelon and corn season,
The earth is a paradise, the morning
Is a ripe plum or a plump tomato
We bite into as if it were the mouth of a lover.

Despite the puzzled face of the young fellow
In scarecrow overalls reading a comic book,
It's all there, the bell peppers, the radishes,
Local blueberries and blackberries
That will stain our lips and tongue
As if we were freezing to death in the snow.

The kid is bored, or pretends to be,
While watching the woman pick up a melon
And press its rough skin against her cheek.
What makes people happy is a mystery,
He concludes as he busies himself
Straightening crumpled bills in a cigar box.

—*Charles Simic*

just writing stuff for people I know."

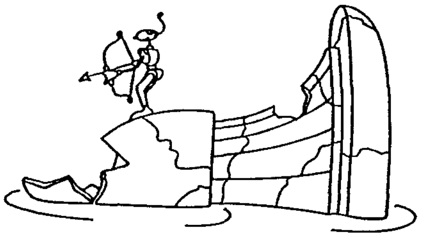
The boundaries between performance and composition have started to relax in recent years—both Philip Glass and Steve Reich, for example, perform their own music with their own ensembles—but the feeling that virtuoso performers are not to be taken seriously as composers persists. Meyer may be particularly vulnerable in this regard, given his lack of academic credentials as a composer; in any case, he is typically understated about his composing ambitions. "I took a couple of lessons in composition once, and I wasn't liking it too much," he said. "A lot of my instruction was accidental—reading my dad's college textbooks when I was a kid, picking up things from my friends. But that's about it. When I hear something I like, I try to figure it out and add it to what I do. My classical influences are real middle-of-the-road: Bach, Mozart, Beethoven. My music is probably a little conservative, in that it's so rooted in the old guys. I think twentieth-century guys have probably figured out a lot of neat shit that I don't really know about. And I certainly plan on catching more of that as I get older. But that wasn't what brought me into music. As a composer, I probably try to combine the things that excited me about music when I was a kid."

Meyer's popular successes have placed him in danger of being tagged with the most poisonous epithet among serious music lovers: "crossover." As far as Meyer is concerned, however, he's not crossing over into anything; he's just doing what he wants to do. And he has made believers of those in the top rank of classical performers who have played his music. Carter Brey, the principal cellist of the New York Philharmonic, who joined Meyer for a performance of the Double Concerto for Cello and Bass in Los Angeles last year, says that Meyer's music, with its rhythmic complications and its demands for spare, unmannered sound, "jolted me out of a complacent way of thinking about how to play a string instrument. You have to put your classical training in a drawer for a while to play Edgar's music. He doesn't want the fatty, supercharged sound that those of us trained in the tradition of the Russian School produce." Joshua Bell says, "Edgar's music only seems simple from the outside. It's actually amazingly intricate. That's a pretty tough trick." David Finckel, of the Emerson Quartet, puts Meyer in the company of other American composers who were once disparaged for being too accessible. "We need to remember that in the sixties and seventies there was a violent reaction against Copland, Bernstein, Barber," he says. "Edgar is writing what he loves and believes in, and anybody who does that runs the risk of condescension." Yo-Yo Ma says, "If people think his music is simplistic, they should try to play it. And if they read Edgar himself as unsophisticated they need to read again."

Carter Brey recalls going on an outing with Meyer when they were both performing in the Seattle area. "A group of us were walking in the woods on Mt. Rainier, and at one point Edgar separated himself from us," Brey said. "I came on him while he was standing by himself next to a tree, watching a stream. He was swaying and gyrating, as if he were lost in some inner music."

Meyer is a musical dreamer whose work belongs to that essentially optimistic strain in American music which connects Ives to Fourth of July bands, Copland to cowboy songs, Bernstein to Broadway, Philip Glass to MTV. "I'd say that a big piece of what I'm doing is trying to get in touch with the underlying universal principles of music," he told me one day, without a hint of grandiosity. "I do think that there are some root principles that show up wherever there's exciting music—broad, basic things, like melody and rhythm. These things have the force of nature behind them. Trying to get around melody and rhythm is like fighting gravity."

When I asked David Shifrin, the artistic director of the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, about Meyer's all-embracing approach, he said, "Edgar isn't blending two or more worlds—he's living in a single very large world." As Meyer himself put it, "Music is just the best place to be." ♦



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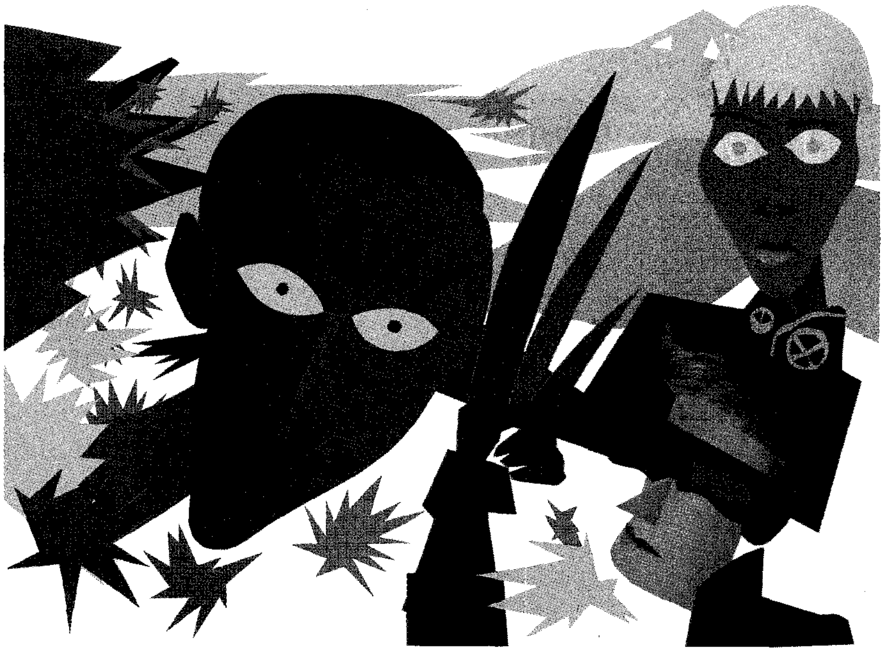
THE CURRENT CINEMA

DAZZLED

Mutants and the human problem.

BY DAVID DENBY

As a small child, I had a recurring daydream that I could fly around in my bed, sweep down, bonk villains on the head with the bedframe, and then rescue attractive persons in distress. My fantasies, tepidly stimulated, I suppose, by what I read in picture books and saw in movies in the late forties, were prosaic by any standard. (Even in dreams, I never got out from under the covers.) But what, I wonder, will children's fantasies be like now, in the age of "The Matrix" and the new "X-Men," when a character who doesn't fight in midair, walk through solid surfaces, or transform himself from a movie star into a snouted beast and back again hardly qualifies for a high-class action picture? Movies may not have become more imaginative, but they have definitely become more fantastic. A friend who loves the new, dazzlingly aerated style says we have entered an age of "visual rapture." My own ideas of movie rapture center more on a man and a woman talking quietly in a still frame, but I know what he means. The essence of visual rapture is metamorphosis. Gravity has given up its remorseless pull; one person's flesh can turn into another's, or melt, or become waxy, claylike, or metallic; the ground is not so much terra firma as a launching pad for the true cinematic space, the air, where bodies zoom like projectiles and actual projectiles (bullets, say) sometimes move slowly enough to be inspected by the naked eye. Roll over, Newton; computer imagery has altered the integrity of time and space.



"X-Men," based on the Marvel Comics characters, pushes further into the fantastic.

STEPHEN KRONINGER

"X-Men," directed by Bryan Singer, and written by David Hayter from a story by Singer and Tom DeSanto, is the best of the recent fantasias, and the most exciting comic-strip movie since the original "Batman." It is a feast of astonishments, many of them no more than semi-comprehensible. Children aren't the only ones who may want to see "X-Men" more than once to sort out the thickly allusive texture of reference; the movie, based on the characters created by Stan Lee for Marvel Comics, is haunted by myth and legend—a long, long backlog of hurts, triumphs, secret experiments, and unspeakable humiliations, whose unfolding we seem to be encountering midway through. (The screenplay has been designed for both prequels and sequels.) The movie begins with a boy who is wrested from his parents in a concentration camp—Singer stages the scene powerfully, in rain and muck—and who survives by means of mysterious special powers (we see him bend a metal fence by magnetic force). Years later, he has grown into Magneto (Sir Ian McKellen), one of a group of powerful mutants who have been randomly produced by evolutionary quirk and left to roam the earth. Magneto and his ilk are lost souls who band together for comfort and understanding. They are meant to be a somewhat more marvellous and flamboyant version of Jews, or homosexuals, or blacks, or any minority whose gifts are both envied and loathed. Feared by the regular humans, they will never be accepted, according to Magneto, and, since they are superior, he believes that they should slaughter the rest of humanity or supplant it—inhabit the bodies of men and women and turn them into mutants. Magneto has been engaged in a long quarrel about this with Professor Xavier (Patrick Stewart), a wise, gravel-voiced mutant who has such remarkable telepathic powers that he can enter people's heads and form their thoughts. Xavier thinks that humans, even if they hate mutants, should be protected. "X-Men" combines the fear of aliens invading and replacing us (an old sci-fi trope) with a spectacular war of the gods. Each leader has a loyal crew—the X-Men—and the two sides take turns blowing each other away, while the humans are mere baffled and irrelevant spectators. The movie might be called a struggle between the spirit of domination and the grace of noblesse oblige.

Bryan Singer, the greatly talented director of the Hollywood cult favorite "The Usual Suspects," is back on top after his misadventures with the dreadful "Apt Pupil"—and this time, I suspect, for good. Singer brings an edge to every scene; he has a tense but always engaging way with character, and he's becoming a visual master. In the garrulous and profane "Usual Suspects," he administered little verbal shocks—the movie was mischievously nasty. Here he administers the shocks visually. "X-Men" pushes further into the fantastic than you expect without losing its character-based conflicts and loyalties. The cinematography, by Newton Thomas Sigel, who did last year's freewheeling "Three Kings," takes advantage of the license of comic-book style by going deep into color-coördinated excess. In a snow scene, flakes suddenly spin around in funnelled fury; Magneto performs human experiments, and explosions of white light sear our eyes like phosphor. John Myhre's futuristic sets look like giant bank vaults, but Singer is not imprisoned by the grandeur—he whirls through it. Many of the visual effects are both frightening and beautiful. After Magneto uses his powers to pull guns out of the hands of the police, he reverses the direction of the guns, making them hover in the air before the policemen's heads; a bullet, retarded by magnetic brakes, twists its way toward one man's forehead and begins, with excruciating slowness, to bore its way in.

Singer builds the characters and then lets the action flow from their special physical skills. He may even have found a major new star in Hugh Jackman, the Australian actor who plays Wolverine, a tormented mutant fighter with retractable metal claws. Brawny but lithe, Jackman gives an aggressively sexual performance, though there's no sex in the movie. Singer gets something going between Jackman and Famke Janssen, a mutant doctor with telepathic powers, but he throws it away. The real love match is a meeting of souls between Jackman and Anna Paquin (the girl in "The Piano"), an anguished teen-age mutant who tries to make out with her human boyfriend and winds up putting him in a coma. (One reason the mutants have to stick together is that when they inadvertently hurt each other they recover quickly.) In general, Xavier's crew is more humanlike, Magneto's more bizarre. Mystique (Rebecca Romijn-Stamos) can morph into anything and then back to a nude, blue-silicon torso, one of the most stunning shapes in recent movies. The rippling muscles and high, round breasts of idealized comic-book figures can now be approached by these super-conditioned actors. The most striking element of visual rapture is the sight of sublime bodies flying through the air. Eroticism has been transformed into airborne athleticism.

The X-Men became familiar to some of us when, as parents, we stepped on Wolverine's claws late at night in our children's darkened bedrooms. Those figures, Wolverine, Magneto, and the rest, will be back on the floor, and in force. Cast in plastic, the X-Men become relatively ordinary. Onscreen, however, they are overwhelming, and I am left with one doubt: will the movie's visual rapture prove so strong that it takes over children's dreams, doing all the work for them, and leaving them with nothing that is quite their own?

I wouldn't have bothered with "Chuck & Buck," but word has gotten around that it's a good movie, so a little poison poured into the public's ear has become necessary. Chuck and Buck are the names of two lovers. They were lovers when they were eleven, somewhere in Northern California, only Chuck and his family moved away, and, at the age of twenty-seven, he's known as Charlie (Chris Weitz), and he's a sleek record producer in Los Angeles who lives with a fine woman. Buck (Mike White), however, has spent the intervening years thinking of Chuck, and he pursues him, spying on him at work and at home. He's supposed to be a voyeuristic creep, of course, but saintly all the same—an innocent in love. Shot in digital video, the picture lacks the scale and detail of a real movie. It feels clammy and claustrophobic, and it's filled with closeups of the two actors staring in open-mouthed stupor. I couldn't escape the feeling that the amateurishness of "Chuck & Buck" is being indulged for politically correct reasons. If the movie were about a hetero man pursuing a woman he has long been obsessed with, wouldn't it be seen as an obnoxious brief for harassment and infantilism? ♦

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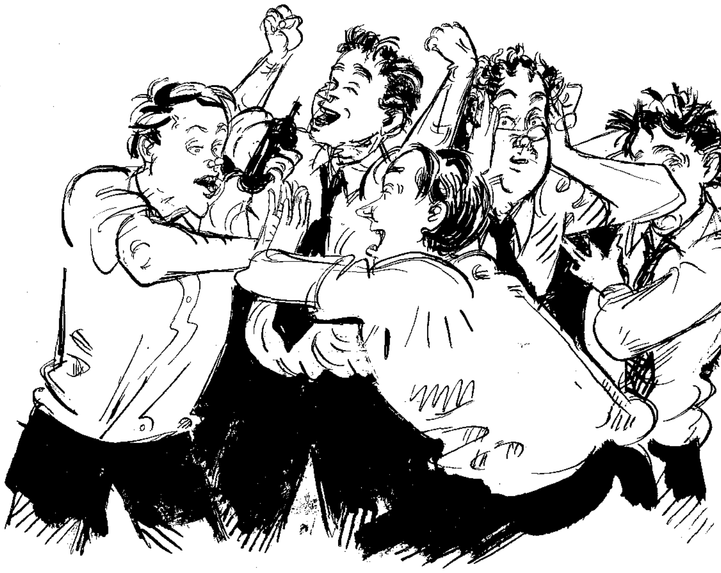
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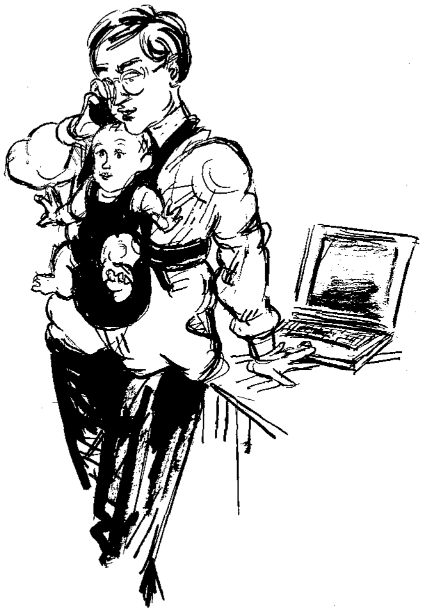
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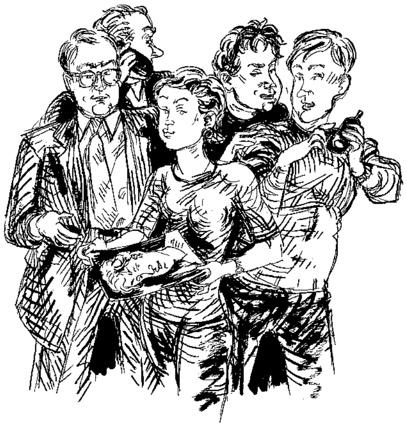
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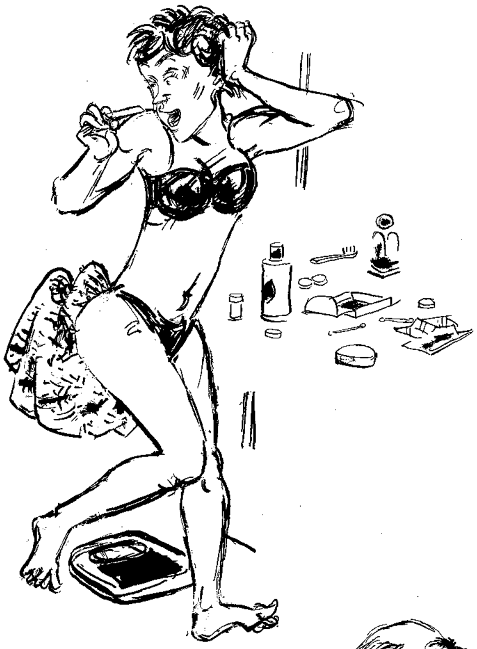
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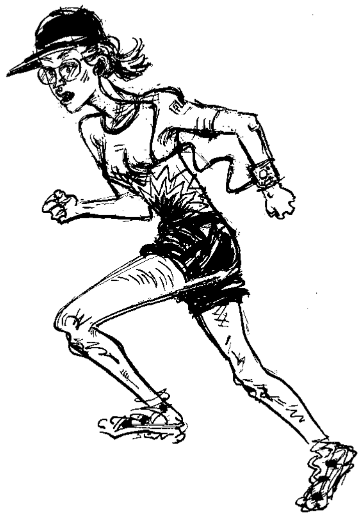
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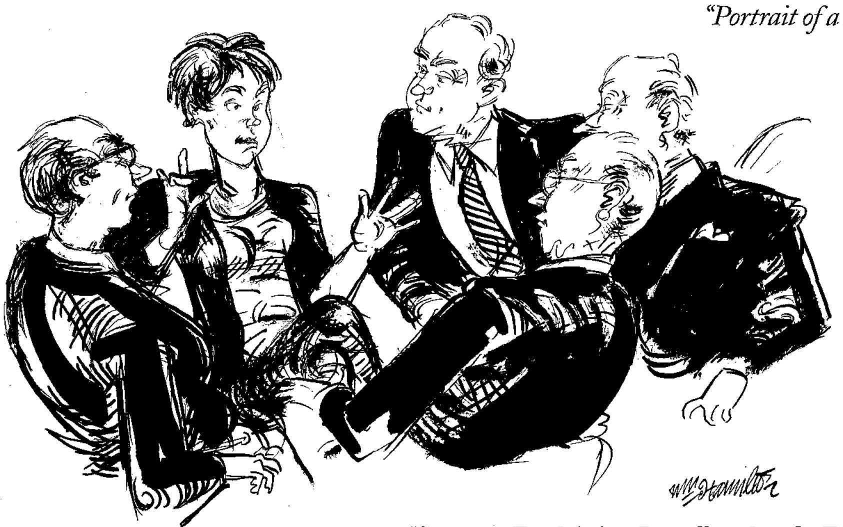

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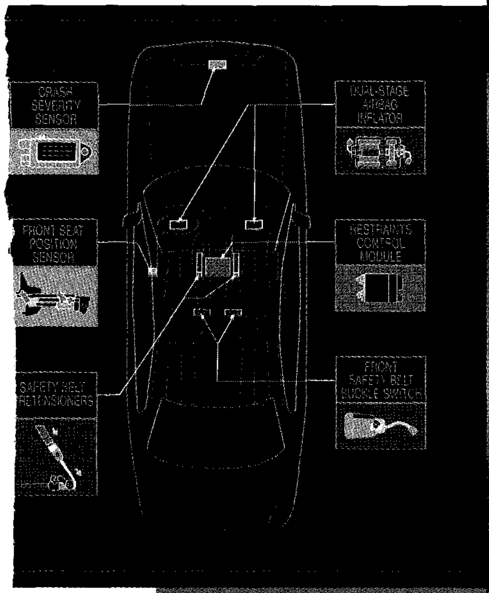
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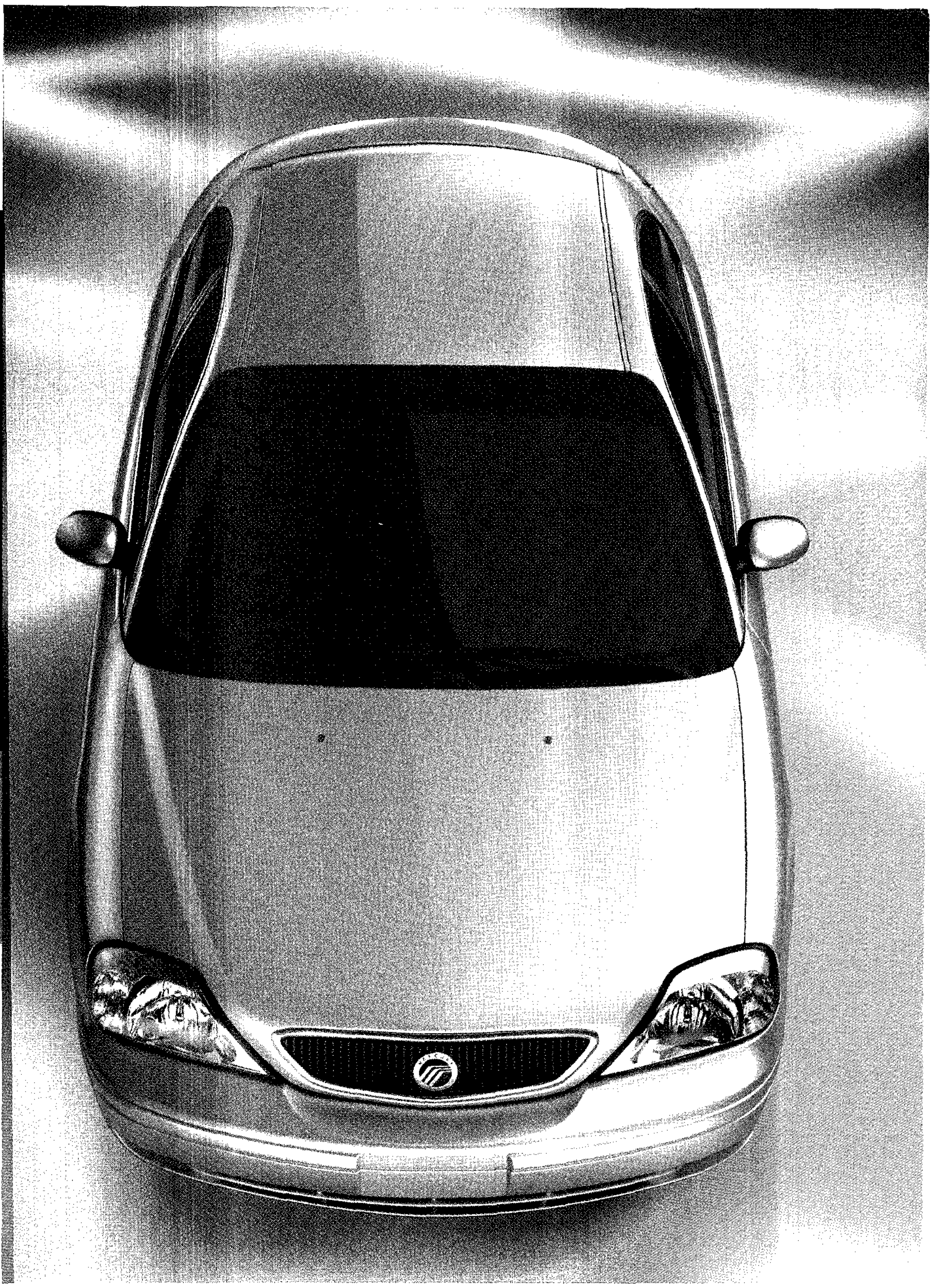

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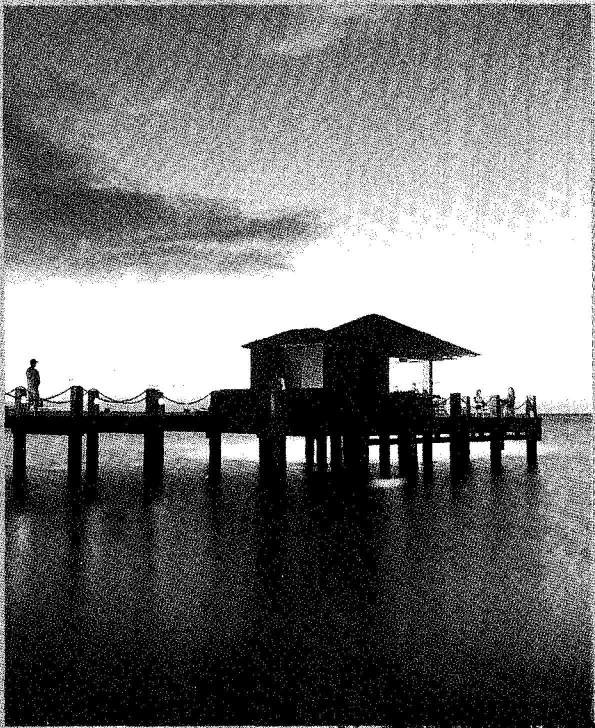

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